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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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MAMATA & MANN SAY 'NO, THANK YOU' TO INDIA

TMC in WB, AAP in Punjab are set to go solo for LS polls

KOLKATA/ CHANDIGARH, 24 JAN

In a double whammy for the Opposition INDIA bloc, Chief Ministers of West Bengal and Punjab on Wednesday said there will be no alliance with the Congress. This is for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. They said that their parties TMC and AAP will go it alone in the respective states.

The surprise announcement by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee that caught Congress off guard came on the back of the growing tussle between the Trinamool Congress(TMC) and the grand old party over sharing of seats to be contested in the key eastern state. It also came just a day ahead of the scheduled entry of the Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra into West Bengal.

A total of 28 parties have come together to form the INDIA grouping to take on the BJP in the Lok Sabha elections.

According to sources, TMC had offered only two seats to Congress based on its 2019 Lok Sabha polls performance. This was not acceptable to Congress causing strains between the two parties in West Bengal which accounts for 42 parliamentary seats.

A rattled Congress appeared to underplay the rift with TMC on the seat-sharing issue in West Bengal, asserting that no one can imagine the existence of the INDIA without Mamata Banerjee and that her party is an "important pillar" of the Opposition alliance.

BJP also waded into the TMC-Congress tussle, claiming that Banerjee's decision is a sign of her desperation and it will be a "death knell" for the INDIA bloc.

In Chandigarh, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann said his party will not enter into an alliance with the Congress in the state, reiterating that the Arvind Kejriwal-led Aam Aadmi Party(AAP) will win all 13 seats at stake.

Denying reports that the TMC and Congress are in talks for seat-sharing, Banerjee asserted that she has not spoken to anyone in the grand old party on the issue. TMC Supremo also stressed that her party would prepare its strategies at the national-level after the elections are over.

"At the national level, we, as part of the INDIA grouping, will decide our strategy after the elections. We will do whatever it takes to defeat BJP," she added.

—PTI

Mamata Banerjee and Bhagwant Mann **PHOTO: PTI**

TMC sources blame Cong's unreasonable demand over rift

New Delhi, 24 Jan

TMC sources on Wednesday claimed Congress delayed the talks and made unreasonable demands on seat-sharing without acknowledging the ground reality. Trinamool Congress (TMC) is open to "courtesy back-channel" talks but there is hardly any hope left for reaching a pact, they said. Maintaining that TMC had offered two Lok Sabha seats to the Congress in West Bengal, a senior party leader said it is open to discussing a third seat, provided Congress agrees to give the TMC seats in Meghalaya and Assam. The TMC leader accused the Congress of causing "unreasonable delay" in seat-sharing discussions, saying no communication has happened in the last two weeks. The leader also alleged that the Congress was making unreasonable demands in terms of the number of seats without acknowledging the ground reality of Bengal. *—PTI*

Didi escapes accident with just head injury

BARDHAMAN, 24 JAN

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee injured her forehead on Wednesday, after her car had to suddenly stop to avoid a collision with another vehicle here, a senior official said.

Banerjee, who was seated in front beside the driver, was injured after her head hit the windscreen. The accident took place when she was returning to Kolkata from an administrative review meeting in Purba Bardhaman.

Later in the evening went to the Raj Bhavan to meet Governor C V Ananda Bose. Banerjee had last year suffered a knee injury while alighting from a helicopter in Sevoke in north Bengal. Meanwhile, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh, who is presently in Assam for Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, wished her a speedy recovery. *—PTI*

The accident took place when she was returning to Kolkata from an administrative review meeting in Purba Bardhaman **PHOTO: PTI**

Kid dies by suicide after jumping from 29th floor flat in City

BENGALURU, 24 JAN

A seventh grade student jumped from a balcony of 29th floor in Hulimavu on Wednesday. The girl, 12, who is a student at a Bannerghatta school was discovered by the security guard of the apartment after hearing the noise in the corridor around 5 am on Wednesday. The guard found her lifeless body and immediately alerted others. According to the police the girl was the only child of the couple. The mother discovered the girl outside her room around 4:30 am, and when questioned about being up so early, she provided a vague reply before going back into her room. The police suspect suicide, citing depression as a possible factor, although no suicide note was found. The post-mortem has been conducted, and further details are not disclosed.

—Salar News

The police suspect depression to be the reason **PHOTO: PTI**

GREEN LINE METRO CLOSED TILL 28 JAN

BENGALURU, 24 JAN

Bengaluru Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) train service from Peenya Industry to Nagasandra station on the green line will be closed for three days from 23 to 28 January. According to the press release from BMRCL, the station will be closed due to the commissioning of works at Madavara metro station. It has advised the commuters to buy tickets via Whatsapp or Namma Metro to control the crowd at the Peenya and Goraguntepalya metro station.

Metro service from Nagasandra and silk institute metro trains will resume on 29 January at 5 am. Meanwhile, in view of the Lalbagh flower show the Namma Metro has introduced paper tickets which will be valid only on the day of purchase.

—Salar News

SALAR EXCLUSIVE

Bihar auto drivers leave state amid crackdown

BENGALURU, 24 JAN

Having a tough time finding an auto on apps? According to an investigative report done by Salar News, it is found that about a thousand autorickshaw drivers hailing from places like Semra in East Champaran district of Bihar have moved to other cities, thanks to the recent crackdown by the traffic police and the RTO against unauthorised autorickshaws. Explaining what transpired, K Somashekar Gowda, President of the Karnataka Rajya Chalakara Parishat, which aids auto drivers in the City, said, "In November and December 2023, we started getting information on accident cases involving autos plying in the outskirts of the City. When we ran a background check we found out that most of these autos did not have the necessary documents required to ply in the City.

—SALAR NEWS

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Rowdy sheeter hacked to death at his house in B'luru

BENGALURU, 24 JAN

Rowdy sheeter was hacked to death in Vivek Nagar during on Wednesday by unidentified assailants. The deceased is Satish alias Military Satish. The accused attacked him with sharp objects when he was sleeping outside his home in Mayabazar slum in Vivek Nagar at around 3 am. According to the Vivek Nagar Police, several cases were registered against the deceased. The police are suspecting an old rivalry to be the reason of murder. A FIR was registered based on Satish wife's complaint.

—PTI

Assam Rifles man opens fire at colleagues, kills self

IMPHAL, 24 JAN

At least six Assam Rifles personnel were injured after a soldier opened fire at them before killing himself in Manipur's Chandel district, police said on Wednesday. The incident took place in Sajik Tampak area late on Tuesday when the Assam Rifles jawan fired at his colleagues, they said. He later shot himself dead, a police officer said. The injured personnel, who are undergoing treatment, are reported to be in "stable condition", the officer said.

—PTI

Farmers call for bandh on 16 February

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

Samyukt Kisan Morcha, central trade unions (CTU) and independent sectoral federations on Wednesday appealed to "like-minded" organisations and individuals to join their industrial and rural bandh on 16 February. In a joint statement, the SKM and, Joint Platform of CTUs appealed to all sections including students, youth, women, pensioners, small traders, truck operators, professionals, journalists, cultural activists and others to "bring the real livelihood issues back to the national agenda." "In the context of the growing corporate, communal and authoritarian attack on the people under the Modi Government, the larger unity of the people is inevitable to save the basic principles of democracy," the statement read.*—PTI*

India, France, UAE hold mega air exercise

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

India, France and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) carried out a mega air exercise over the Arabian Sea against the backdrop of the rising global concerns over Houthi militants targeting several commercial vessels in the strategic waterways in the region.

The exercise 'Desert Knight', conducted on Tuesday, featured several frontline aerial assets and combat jets of the air forces of the three countries, officials said.

The Indian Air Force (IAF) component at the drills consisted of Su-30 MKI, MiG-29 and Jaguar fighter jets besides AWACS (airborne early warning and control aircraft), C-130-J transport plane and air-to-air refuelling aircraft.

"The main focus of exercise 'Desert Knight' was on enhancing synergy and interoperability between the three air forces," the Indian Air Force said. The exercise took place in the Indian FIR (Flight Information Regions) and with IAF aircraft operated from several bases in India.

All airspace worldwide is divided into FIRs and each of them is managed by a controlling authority responsible for ensuring that air traffic services are provided to aircraft flying within it. The exercise came amid increasing attacks on commercial vessels by Houthi militants in the Red Sea.

"While the French participation included the Rafale fighter aircraft and a multi role tanker transport, the UAE Air Force fielded the F-16," the IAF said in a statement. *—PTI*

Aircrafts during Exercise Desert Knight, a joint military exercise between India, France and UAE **PHOTO: INDIAN AIR FORCE/ @IAF_MCC**

RINGS OF FIRE

A soldier practices ahead of Republic Day parade in Bengaluru's Manekshaw Grounds. Bengaluru police will deploy 9 DCPs, 16 ACPs and 184 police in civil dress along with 100 CCTV cameras. The attendees are prohibited from carrying cigarettes, sharp objects, crackers and food items. Attendees have been asked not to park vehicles on Central Street, Cubbon Road and MG Road **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

'RAHUL WILL BE ARRESTED AFTER LS ELECTIONS'

GUWAHATI, 24 JAN

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, against whom an FIR has been registered here on the charge of instigating violence will be arrested after the Lok Sabha elections, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Wednesday. Assam police suo motu registered the FIR against Gandhi and several other leaders for "wanton acts of violence" here during the party's 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' on Tuesday."We have filed an FIR. A Special Investigation Team (SIT) will conduct the investigation and he (Gandhi) will be arrested after the Lok Sabha elections", Sarma said on the sidelines of a programme at Nazira in Sibsagar district.The Lok Sabha elections are due within a few months in the country.Director General of Police G P Singh said that the case has been transferred to the Assam CID for a thorough investigation through an SIT to be constituted by the Additional Director General of Police (CID). Sarma had instructed the DGP to register a case against Gandhi for provoking the crowd to break barricades in an attempt to enter Guwahati city during the Yatra on Tuesday leading to a scuffle with the police in which some senior Congress leaders, including the state party President Bhupen Bora and leader of opposition in the state assembly, and four police personnel were injured.

The FIR was filed against Congress leaders under IPC sections that deal with criminal conspiracy, unlawful assembly, rioting, assault or criminal force to deter public servants from discharging their duty, damaging public property and others.

—PTI

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FAMILY DESTROYED

Man kills sister, mother over affair

MYSURU, 24 JAN

A 25-year-old pushed his sister and mother into a lake at Marur village of Hunsur taluk. The brother Nithin killed his sister and mother over the girl's alleged relationship with a Muslim youth.

The victims are Anita, 45, and her daughter Dhanushree, 19.

Dhanushri is a second-year B.Com student of a college in Hunsur.

Reportedly the accused had taken the mother and sister on a bike with the pretext of seeing an ailing relative on Tuesday. Later, he had stopped the vehicle near the lake where he and his sister got into a heated argument and he pushed her into the water body.

The mother allegedly jumped in to save Dhanushri. However, he attempted to save his mother by jumping into the water but could not succeed. Nithin returned home and informed his father about the incident. The accused even showed his father the place of incident around 10 pm

The Hunsur rural police registered a case and arrested the accused. The bodies were discovered floating in the lake and were retrieved by the fire department personnel.

—Salar News

Dhanushri, Anita, Nithin **PHOTO: SALAR**

- Reportedly the accused had taken the mother and sister on a bike with the pretext of seeing an ailing relative on Tuesday. Later, he had stopped the vehicle near the lake where they got into a argument.

Modi-Macron to hold talks over defence

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

Shoring up cooperation in areas of defence and security, trade, climate change, clean energy and mobility of students and professionals is set to be the focus of talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron in Jaipur on Thursday.

Macron, who will grace the Republic Day celebrations at the Kartavya Path, will kick-start his two-day trip to India from Jaipur where he will visit the Pink City's stunning hilltop fort of Amber, the iconic Hawa Mahal and the astronomical observation site of Jantar Mantar.

French President's visit is taking place as top negotiators from the two sides are looking at finalising two mega defence deals for India's procurement of 26 Rafale-M (marine version) fighter jets and three French-designed Scorpene submarines.

It is understood that significant progress has been made in the negotiations including on price and various other technical aspects for the procurement of the mega key platforms.

"This reciprocal invitation to national day celebrations is unprecedented, and shows the deep mutual trust and unwavering friendship underpinning Indo-French ties," a French readout said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: SALAR

Man held in teacher's murder case in Mandya

MANDYA, 24 JAN

Mandya police on Wednesday arrested 21-year-old Nitish in a teacher's murder case. The police cracked the case within 30 hours after the teacher's body was found buried near a temple in Melukote on Tuesday. The 28-year-old teacher of a private school was reported missing from 20 January. Deepika's husband Lokesh had reported her missing and a search led to the discovery of her scooter near Melukote Hill. Police probe revealed that Nitish who is Deepika's friend strangulated and buried her body at the foot of Melukote Hill. During the probe, Nitish remained under the radar but police suspected his involvement after a tourist video showing a man dragging a body down the hill went viral. Nitish was identified from the video. The police arrested him from Hospet, Vijayanagara. The accused confessed to the murder. A day after the murder, Nitish called Deepika's father and pretended to inquire about her whereabouts.

—Salar News

Minister Ramalinga Reddy lauds BMTC drivers

BENGALURU, 24 JAN

Ramalinga Reddy, the Transport Minister of Karnataka, acknowledged the commendable efforts of BMTC drivers, highlighting their crucial role in ensuring safe transportation for passengers near Kathriguppe in Bengaluru on Wednesday. Speaking at an event, Reddy honoured 171 BMTC drivers with gold Medals and a cash prise of Rs 5000 on National Driver's Day. The recognition was bestowed in light of their remarkable achievement of 10 years of accident-free driving. Additionally, the event marked the completion of 25 years for BMTC. He highlighted BMTC completes around 1,56,000 trips every day with utmost care. Reddy announced in upcoming days BMTC is planning to release additional 5,000 new buses. Currently, around 8,700 new BMTC staff are set to be appointed in the month of April under different grades. The Minister assured that those who received gold medals would not be involved in any accidents until their retirement. In the upcoming days, they will receive an additional 100 rupees in their salary.

—Salar News

BJP writes to Guv to postpone State budget

BENGALURU, 24 JAN

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders on Wednesday met Governor Thawar Chand Gehlot requesting the postponement of the State budget scheduled on 16 February. The State Legislative Council from Bengaluru Teachers' Constituency polling date is also on 16 February. It is scheduled between 8 am to 4 pm. Hence Opposition requested for postponement. The Election Commission (EC) announced the election date through a notification on 16 January whereas Chief Minister Siddaramaiah through the media announced the budget date on 20 January. BJP in its letter to the Governor said according to the code of conduct, no minister including the Chief Minister cannot announce, inaugurate or lay foundation to any of the educational institutions that can influence the decision of the voters.State which is presenting its budget on the same day is likely to announce several plans concerning departments which might influence the voters, claimed BJP. It is now clear that the said strategy is to lure voters during polling of the Teachers' Constituency and it is clearly unethical and a violation of the Representation of Peoples Act and a blatant violation of the Model Code of Conduct.*—Salar News*

Bihar to City & back: A long ride for illegal auto drivers

Auto drivers with fake documents flee city after RTO crackdown

DANIEL GEORGE
VAISHNAVI GOPALRAJ
BENGALURU, 24 JAN

If you are among those who have been unable to get a quick auto ride on your favourite apps such as Ola, Uber, Rapido and Namma Yatri in the last few days, it is because there are not enough autorickshaw drivers available to ferry you across the City.

According to report, it is found that nearly a thousand rickshaw drivers have moved to other cities due to the crackdown by the traffic police and RTO against unauthorised rickshaws **PHOTO: SALAR**

According to an investigative report done by **Salar News**, it is found that nearly a thousand auto rickshaw drivers hailing from places like Semra in East Champaran district of Bihar have moved to other cities thanks to the recent crackdown by the traffic police and the RTO against unauthorised autorickshaws. Explaining what transpired, K. Somashekar Gowda , President of the Karnataka Rajya Chalakara Parishat, which aids auto drivers in the City, said, "In November and December 2023 we started getting information on accident cases involving autos plying in the outskirts of the City. When we ran a background check we found out that most of these autos did not have the necessary documents required to ply in the City. The officials then asked the local auto drivers to keep an eye on these 'unauthorised drivers' and report them to the police. This also caused a lot of bad blood between the two groups which also resulted in a protest by the 'unauthorised drivers'. Rakesh, an auto driver from Siddapura said that the local auto drivers were finding it difficult to get customers thanks to high influx of autos. "All their driving licenses are fake. Three of them take turns to drive one vehicle, one in the morning, one in the afternoon and the other at night. This had caused a lot of tension between the two groups," he added.

The matter was taken to the RTO by the Auto Drivers' Association, following which the RTO issued a notice asking all auto drivers to carry legal documents with them at all times. Failure to produce the documents when asked would result in the vehicles being seized. It was at this point that the drivers who did not have valid documents fled to places like Hyderabad and Mumbai.

Speaking to Salar News, N Velumani, partner of VM Finance one of the largest financiers of auto rickshaws in the City said "The allegations by local auto drivers that we are encouraging some auto drivers to function without valid paperwork is false. In fact, 65 per cent of the drivers who we have financed are from Bengaluru or other parts of Karnataka, and only 35 percent of the drivers are from Bihar''."Aadhaar card is a document accepted across the country. When an auto driver approaches us for funds to buy a new vehicle, we check his residential agreement, send one of our staffers to do a background check and ensure that there are guarantors for the person who is availing the loan.

Harshitha Raju, a commuter said, "If these autos are not unauthorised, that jeopardises the safety of women." Now, local auto drivers want us to finance only those people whose Aadhaar is from Karnataka. How is this fair?'' Velumani asked.In this turf war between the auto drivers from the City and those from outside the State, it is the commuter who depends on autos for their daily ride who is the loser.

—Salar News

DKS'S PROMISE

'Mekedatu project will be completed in Cong' tenure'

BENGALURU, 24 JAN

DK Shivakumar **PHOTO: PTI**

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Wednesday promised that they will complete Mekedatu project during the tenure of present Congress government to protect farmers of State. "Former prime minister HD Deve Gowda said the Congress government is not thinking about Mekedatu project. Gowda and Prime Minister Modi are close. Gowda can talk to him directly and get permission for the Mekedatu project," Shivakumar said at the inauguration of Muttinamulusoge project of Periyapatna taluk in Mysuru district.

Accusing BJP MPs elected from the State over their silence on the Mekedatu project, Shivakumar said, "The BJP MPs are not speaking on behalf of the State. Why is not Pratap Simmha not doing anything; he can tell the Prime Minister and get permission. But nobody is raising their voice."

Instead of forest lands, revenue lands will be handed over for the project, he said. "We have informed officials of Chamarajanagar, Mandya, Mysuru and Bengaluru rural areas. The Forest Department officials have been instructed to count the trees, in the revenue land," Shivakumar said.

After the project materialises about 66 TMC of water can be harvested from the Mekedatu project, he said. "When there was no water in Harangi, Kabini, KRS, or Hemavathi reservoirs, we started Mekedatu Padayatra after worshipping Mother Kaveri to save our farmers."

Accusing BJP and JD(S) of not keeping their promises, Shivakumar said, "Let the BJP-Janata Dal talk whatever they want. Because both parties have not kept their promises. Janata Dal is the mouthpiece of BJP."

KPCC President lashed out at BJP for politicising 'Hindu' religion.

"Some people are doing politics of emotions while we are doing politics of livelihood. Livelihoods are more important than emotions. We are also Hindus and we also practice our traditions. BJP is capitalising on mantrakshathe while we believe that our schemes are the manthrakshathe for the problems of people," he said.

—Salar News

CM slams BJP for obstructing Nyay Yatra

BENGALURU, 24 JAN

Siddaramaiah **PHOTO: PTI**

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Wednesday condemned Assam government for blocking Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in Assam. "Despite writing a letter to Prime Minister and Union Home Minister, they have not responded. The Constitution has given the freedom to every citizen to undertake a Padayatra or protest against any government," said Siddaramaiah at Periyapatna in Mysuru district.

Siddaramaiah said BJP was deliberately creating problems for Nyaya Yatra. "The Chief Minister of Assam was first in the Congress and later joined BJP and became the Chief Minister. They are doing this to please Amit Shah and Narendra Modi. A Chief Minister under any circumstances should not behave like this," the Chief Minister said. "There is a threat to the Nehru family and it is the duty of the Government of India and the State government of Assam to provide adequate security to Rahul Gandhi. It is not their dereliction of duty but their security system has failed. Encouraging such acts is unconstitutional," he added. Drought remedy has been brought to PM's notice About the drought compensation for farmers in State, Siddaramaiah said Shah told him that the compensation from the Centre would be released on 23 December but they did not. "When Modi recently visited Bengaluru, I spoke to him about it. I explained to him the situation of the farmers who were affected by the drought," Siddaramaiah said. First instalment will be released to farmers in a week"Until today, our government has managed to ensure that the drinking water of the cattle and the people is not disturbed. We have released Rs 550 crore as compensation to farmers in the first phase so far. Efforts are being put to deliver the first instalment of compensation to all the farmers within the next week," he said.

About speculations that MLC Jagdish Shettar will return to BJP, Siddaramaiah said Shettar himself said he would not return to BJP.

—Salar News

CLIMATE CHANGE

B'luru heats up; experts say Brand B'luru not priority

BENGALURU, 24 JAN

There have been predictions of the maximum temperature of the City touching 31 degrees Celsius this year **PHOTO: PTI**

The gradual increase in temperature has already brought in the summer feels in City. There have been predictions of the maximum temperature of the City touching 31 degrees Celsius this year. In 2023, the City recorded a maximum of 28 degrees Celsius.

"Global and local phenomena have significantly contributed to the rising temperature," TV Ramachandra, the Professor at the Centre for Ecological Sciences at the Indian Institute of Science, told **Salar News**. "The destruction of major vegetation and water bodies in the City is a major factor in creating climate fluctuations."The expert said the current unplanned urbanisation is creating the concrete islands in Bengaluru. The urban areas, where these structures are highly concentrated and greenery are limited, become "islands" of higher temperatures relative to areas on the outskirts.

He said the vegetation or greenery in Bengaluru was 68 per cent in the 1970s but cut to January 2024, 80 per cent of the City is concretised. "Instead of focusing on Brand Bengaluru, the government should focus on liveable Bengaluru first. The companies that are ready to invest in Bengaluru should be diverted to Gulbarga, Belagavi or other Northern parts of Karnataka," Ramachandra said.

The Garden City is short of fresh air and people are ordering oxygen tanks because there is no holistic growth, Ramachandra said. Bhargavi S Rao, an independent researcher and trustee of Environment Support Group (ESG), said, "The local condition of never-ending construction, laying high-rise buildings, underbridges and flyovers have increased the heating in the City. No construction in Bengaluru is done according to its climate. We are pouring tons of cement and steel every day."

The building bylaws of the City have been forgotten, the researcher claimed. "BBMP is taking actions only to tick off their lists. They do random stuff such as launching apps but they are not taking significant actions. Less than 15% of the houses in the City have rainwater harvesting," Rao said. About the people who will be impacted by climate change, she said, "Labourers and pourakarmikas whose houses will be flooded during rains are the ones who will suffer the most because of climate change. The changes should be brought at ward level so that the betterment can be witnessed."

—Salar News

FIR against Youth Cong Chief over rally without permit

BENGALURU, 24 JAN

PHOTO: X/ MOHAMMED HARIS NALAPAD

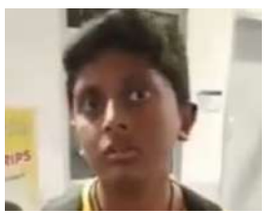
- Youth Congress held a rally after Rahul Gandhi and Congress workers were stopped from entering Guwahati

Bengaluru City Police have filed an FIR against Karnataka Youth Congress President Haris Nalapad for organising a protest with fire torches without necessary permission. The Karnataka Youth Congress held a rally in Bengaluru on Tuesday night after Rahul Gandhi and Congress workers were stopped from entering Guwahati during Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra. The 100-odd protesters, led by Nalpad, voiced their opposition to Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and took out the torch rally from Congress Bhavan to High Grounds.

High Ground police have charged Nalapad with sections 143, 188, 283, 285, 290, 341, and 149 of the IPC for allegedly creating a public nuisance during the rally. On tuesday night under the leadership of Nalapad nearly 100 of people. Nalapad had posted in social media 'X': "We are not scared of your cowardly antics and Karnataka Youth Congress will stand fearlessly with Rahul Gandhi's Bharath Jodo Nyay Yatra." *—Salar News*

Missing City boy found in Hyd after 3 days

BENGALURU, 24 JAN



Parinav **PHOTO: X**

- Even as a few people volunteered to go physically to Majestic, many did what they do best – circulate the posters of the boy online

Since 21 January, when he went missing -- he left his coaching centre in Whitefield in Bengaluru and never returned home -- 12-year-old Parinav, a student of Deens Academy, Gunjur Branch, had always been one step ahead of the police.

By that time, the police tracked him through CCTV footage to a place he had already left it to another. They hit a dead-end at, ironically, Majestic bus station – the fulcrum of Bengaluru that connects the city to every other corner in the state and beyond.

This is when the social media stepped in. Even as a few people volunteered to go physically to Majestic, many did what they do best – circulate the posters of the boy online.

Thanks to the widely circulated pictures, this morning, a Bengaluru resident on a visit to Hyderabad, saw a boy resembling the pictures on her phone, on the same metro as her and confronted him. Much to the joy of his family, friends and all those who invested in the saga and reposted it on various social platforms, the boy confirmed his identity and was detained at Nampally metro station in Hyderabad.

"We don't know the exact details of how he ended up there. We are now rushing to Hyderabad to pick him up, will update you once we know all the details. But I want to thank all those nameless strangers who helped us in finding my boy," said Sukesh, Parinav's father, a software engineer residing in Whitefield. *—PTI*

BENGALURU SEES A DIP IN ONION PRICES

BENGALURU, 24 JAN

The price of onion dropped from Rs 50 per kg to Rs 20 per kg on Wednesday in a relief to Bengalureans. Wholesale rates plummeted to Rs 18. Last month, the retail price stood at Rs 50 and the wholesale rate was Rs 45.The current selling price per quintal is now Rs 1,800.Syed Ziaullah, an onion seller, attributed the dip in prices to the increase in supply. However, Krishi Marata Vaahini anticipates a potential price hike from April onwards.Ziaullah said they are forced to sell onions at decreased prices to avoid a stock pile-up. Aarif Akhtar, a vegetable vendor, told Salar News that he only make a profit of Rs 2 from onion sales. "People easily accept high prices for items such as gold and petrol, while they bargain with us," he said.

Residents are now buying onions in large quantities as they anticipate a price hike soon. *—Salar News*

HC quashes temple panel change

BENGALURU, 24 JAN

Karnataka High Court has quashed the State government's order to appoint two upadhivantas (priests with pooja rights) and scholars by the Supreme Court's directives, for the administration of Shri Mahabaleshwara Swamy Temple in Gokarna.

High Court was responding to a writ petition filed by Ramachandrapura Mutt challenging the government's move. High Court had initially granted an interim stay on the order on 22 August, 2023.

However, the bench led by Justice M Nagaprasanna issued an order overturning the government's decision.They were originally appointed based on Supreme Court's order to oversee the temple's administration. However, on 12 July, 2023, the State government issued a directive for a change. Ramachandrapur Mutt challenged the order arguing that the government lacked the authority to appoint new members.

Supreme Court on 19 April, 2021 ordered the formation of a supervisory committee consisting of eight members including a chairman. The committee was constituted on 4 May, 2021, under the leadership of retired Supreme Court justice BN Krishna to manage the temple.

—Salar News

IN RAICHUR

Govt fails to pay rent for Anganwadi centres

RAICHUR, 24 JAN

Activists are demanding the immediate release of rent to alleviate the financial strain on Anganwadi workers **PHOTO: SALAR**

Anganwadi centres in Raichur are struggling as the State government has not released the rent funds for the past six to eight months, leaving both workers and officials in distress. The Anganwadi workers are borrowing money from other sources relying on their husbands' income to sustain the centres.

In the district, there are 2,856 Anganwadi centres out of which 808 operate from rented buildings. These rented centres are grappling with rent arrears with the government failing to release funds. The rent for Anganwadi buildings in urban areas is Rs 4,000, and in rural areas is Rs 2,000. With 808 centres facing rent arrears, the cumulative amount runs into crores of rupees.

Activists are demanding the immediate release of rent to alleviate the financial strain on Anganwadi workers.

Bhubaneswari, an Anganwadi worker, said, "I have no husband and have three children. It is getting more difficult to survive. A rent of 25,000 is due including all expenses for the past five months."

Padma, the President of the district Anganwadi Workers Association, expressed frustration over the delayed payments.

"Rent and the vegetable bill have not been paid for the past 8 months. Officials are telling us that we will give the budget when it comes, what should we do? Even the phone bill for six months has not been paid," she said.

—Salar News

Kharge writes to Shah over issues faced by RaGa yatra

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge has written to Home Minister Amit Shah on "security issues" faced by Rahul Gandhi during the Assam leg of the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, asking him to ensure the party leader's safety.

In his letter to Shah on Tuesday night, Kharge said there have been several instances where the Assam Police has been found wanting in providing adequate security to Gandhi, who is entitled to Z+ security. Z+ is the highest level of security in India with a team of 55 armed personnel. The letter comes after Congress leaders were booked for "wanton acts of violence" by the Assam Police. On Tuesday, Assam Police registered a case against Gandhi and other Congress leaders for instigating a crowd to launch an attack on Guwahati police.

Police on Tuesday didn't allow the Gandhi-led Yatra to enter the city, triggering protests from irate Congress workers who removed security barricades on the outskirts of the city. Listing out the incidents during which security issues were faced by Gandhi, Kharge said on the first day of the Yatra in the state, Assam Police was found protecting the posters of the BJP in Amguri, Sibsagar district instead of ensuring safe passage for the Yatra. *—PTI*

BJP worker held for offensive post on social media

RAJGARH, 24 JAN

Police arrested a BJP worker in Rajgarh district of Madhya Pradesh on Wednesday for allegedly sharing an objectionable social media post on Hindu deities, an official said.The accused, Saeed Khan Mansoori, a resident of Bhyana village, was arrested and a case was filed against him after some people staged a protest at Limachohan police station over his post, he said. Meanwhile, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) district unit president Gyan Singh Gurjar told reporters that Mansoori has been expelled from the party, and said those who hurt the religious sentiments of Hindus have no place in the organisation.Earlier, several members of Hindutva outfits gathered at the police station to protest against his social media post and expressed their displeasure.Sub Divisional Officer of Police of Sarangpur Arvind Singh and naib tehsildar Surendra Singh pacified the protesters and assured to take action against him. *—PTI*

ED conducts fresh raids at TMC leader Sheikh's home

KOLKATA, 24 JAN

Nineteen days after an Enforcement Directorate(ED)team was assaulted by a mob, ED sleuths again conducted a raid at the residence of absconding TMC leader Shahjahan Sheikh in North 24 Parganas district on Wednesday morning in connection with its probe into the alleged multi-crore ration distribution scam, an officer said.Accompanied by over 120 personnel of the central armed police force, ED broke open the collapsible gate of the residence of Sheikh in in the presence of local police.*—PTI*

'Oppn claims on unemployment propaganda'

CHANDIGARH, 24 JAN

With the Opposition parties often targeting his government on unemployment issue, Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Wednesday hit back and dubbed their claims to be "political propaganda". Dismissing the opposition leaders' remarks regarding unemployment, Khattar said that they quote figures ranging from 9 per cent to 35 per cent, adding they themselves do not know the real figure of unemployment rate.He clarified that the actual unemployment rate is about 8.5 percent, discrediting the opposition's assertions of up to 34 per cent as mere propaganda.ferencing at the Lala Lajpat.*—PTI*

RaGa dares Assam to file more FIRs; says won't be intimated

He alleges that hearts of Modi, Himanta are filled with hatred

BARPETA, 24 JAN

A day after Guwahati Police filed a case against him and other Congress leaders for allegedly provoking crowd, Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday dared the BJP-ruled state to file "as many cases as it can", asserting that he will not be intimidated.

Addressing his first public meeting on the 7th day of 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' in Barpeta district, the Congress leader slammed Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and termed him the "most corrupt CM" of the country with a series of allegations related to land and areca nut.

Rahul Gandhi addresses supporters during the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra *PHOTO: PTI*

"I don't know how Himanta Biswa Sarma got the idea that he can intimidate me by filing cases. File as many cases as you can. File 25 more cases, I am not going to be intimidated. BJP-RSS can't intimidate me", he added.

The Guwahati Police on Tuesday suo motu registered an FIR against Gandhi and other leaders for wanton acts of violence in the state capital.

"I gave a speech against (Narendra) Modi's special friend (Gautam) Adani and case was filed against me. Then they threw me out of parliament and took away my government residence. I gave the keys myself, I don't want it.

"My home is in the heart of every Indian citizen, I live there. I have lakhs of houses in Assam, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and all other states", Gandhi said amidst a huge round of applause from the public.

"While he (Sarma) speaks to you, he steals your land. While you chew betel nut, he corners the supari business. He steals money from your pocket.

He has taken land in Kaziranga National Park also", the Congress leader added.

Referring to the media conglomerate owned by the wife of Assam Chief Minister, Gandhi alleged that TV media shows what Sarma wants in the state. *—PTI*

TMC unlikely to join Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra

KOLKATA, 24 JAN

Trinamool Congress is unlikely to join the Rahul Gandhi-led 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' when it enters West Bengal on 25 January, a senior party leader said on Wednesday. The Yatra, currently in Assam, is scheduled to enter West Bengal through Bakshirhat in Cooch Behar district on 25 January. After a recess of two days –26-27 January, it will be traversing Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar, Uttar Dinajpur and Darjeeling before reaching Bihar on 29 January. It will re-enter West Bengal on 31 January through Malda and travel via Murshidabad, both strongholds of Congress, before leaving the state on 1 February. "We haven't received a formal invitation from the Congress. And even if we receive it we are most unlikely to join it", the senior TMC leader told PTI. *—PTI*

HC junks FIR plea against Rahul

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday disposed of a petition seeking registration of an FIR against Rahul Gandhi for revealing the identity of an alleged rape victim, after taking note of the submissions by Congress leader, the city police and social media platform X that the post has been taken down.

Advocate Tarannum Cheema, representing Gandhi, told a bench of Acting Chief Justice Manmohan and Justice Manmeet PS Arora that the tweet was withheld in India and has been taken down internationally.

—PTI

FAILED FLIGHTS

Mamata on Tuesday criticised Congress for causing a delay in discussions for seat-sharing *PHOTO: PTI*

Without Didi no one can imagine INDIA bloc: Cong

BONGAIGAON, 24 JAN

Congress on Wednesday said no one can imagine the existence of the Opposition INDIA bloc without West Bengal Chief Minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee.

The statement comes immediately after Banerjee announced that her party Trinamool Congress has decided to go alone in the state in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

Addressing a press conference at North Salmara in Assam as part of the party's 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra', Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh said that the Trinamool Congress is an "important pillar" of the opposition alliance.

"We cannot imagine the INDIA alliance without Mamata ji. The INDIA bloc will fight the Lok Sabha polls in West Bengal and all (partners) will participate," he said.

"Banerjee said that defeating BJP is the priority and prime responsibility of all of us. With this sentiment, our 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' will enter West Bengal tomorrow," Ramesh said when asked about the TMC supremo's statement regarding the seat-sharing talks.

Mamata had on Tuesday criticised the Congress for causing a delay in discussions for seat-sharing in West Bengal, citing "unjustified" demand for 10-12 Lok Sabha constituencies when her party was willing to share only two.

Citing Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, he asserted that the TMC and especially Banerjee, who is a leader of West Bengal and India, are "very important pillars of the INDIA alliance".

Ramesh also claimed that seat-sharing talks are "going on" with the TMC for West Bengal" and a solution to the stalemate will be found soon. *—PTI*

Caste, religious differences made to destroy Tamils' unity: TN CM

MADURAI, 24 JAN

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Wednesday said caste and religious differences were created "later" to destroy Tamils' unity and urged them to conduct cultural festivals like the traditional bull-taming sport jallikattu unitedly as Tamils.

MK Stalin *PHOTO: PTI*

- He recalled that DMK founder, the late CN Annadurai gave Tamil Nadu its name (it was earlier known as Madras Presidency) while Karunanidhi ensured classical language status for Tamil.

In his address after inaugurating a grand jallikattu arena named after his father and late DMK patriarch M Karunanidhi, Stalin also charged the central BJP with "enacting a drama" over granting permission to hold the sport in the state, before the Supreme Court gave a favourable verdict on the matter.

He recalled that DMK founder, the late CN Annadurai gave Tamil Nadu its name (it was earlier known as Madras Presidency) while Karunanidhi ensured classical language status for Tamil.

His "Dravida model government" has constructed the grand arena in this district to highlight "aeruthazvhuthal which is a symbol of Tamils' culture," he said.

"At this juncture what I want to tell you is--caste divisions and religious differences were created later to destroy Tamils' unity. Let us conduct such cultural festivals unitedly with the Tamil identity," he said.

Jallikattu is also known as "aeruthazhuvuthal," meaning embracing the bull.

Stalin had earlier made announcement in the state Assembly that a seperate grand arena will be constructed for jallikattu here. *—PTI*

FOR MARATHA QUOTA

Maratha leader Manoj Jarange Patil leads the Maratha Reservation Front's march at Viman Nagar in Pune on Wednesday *PHOTO: PTI*

STUDENTS WAVE BLACK FLAGS AT BENGAL GUV

KOLKATA, 24 JAN

West Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose was shown black flags by two student organisations as he arrived at Calcutta University(CU) here to attend its foundation day function on Wednesday.

As Bose's convoy reached the university gate, students of both Trinamool Chhatra Parishad (TMCP) and leftist AIDSO separately showed black flags to him and shouted "go back" slogans.

However, the policemen present at the spot ensured the convoy went inside the campus and the protestors were kept at a distance.

A TMCP spokesperson said, "We hold the governor responsible for the crumbling of infrastructure in Calcutta University due to the absence of a permanent Vice Chancellor in the university and demanded immediate appointment of a permanent VC".

The AIDSO, students' wing of leftist SUCI (Communist) also made similar demands apart from scrapping the New Education Policy 2020.

Bose came to the university on the occasion of the Calcutta University foundation day programme.

CU has been without a permanent VC since March last year and the Higher Education minister has opposed the appointment of Santa Dutta as the officiating VC by Bose, who is the ex-officio chancellor of the state university. *—PTI*

India's future is based on last 10 years: EAM

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

Foundation of India's future will be the transformation witnessed by it in the last 10 years, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Wednesday, stressing that the country has progressed while carrying forward its traditions and values.

Jaishankar was addressing an interactive session organised by Delhi University's Miranda House College here on the theme 'Future of India.'

Referring to the success of the Chandrayaan-3 mission and the efficiency and scale at which Covid-19 vaccines were manufactured in India, minister said the country has in the last decade taken tremendous strides in different fields and has achieved a strong position in the global arena.

He stressed that India as a democracy has not only worked on upholding its values but also delivered its benefits to all segments of society. *—PTI*

'95% cases filed by ED, CBI are against Oppn'

MUMBAI, 24 JAN

The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader Supriya Sule on Wednesday claimed that as per the government data presented in Parliament, 95 per cent of the cases filed by the central probe agencies are against leaders of opposition parties.

She accused the government of misusing the probe agencies, and asserted that truth shall ultimately prevail.

NCP MP was speaking to reporters outside her party office in south Mumbai after accompanying MLA Rohit Pawar to ED office located nearby.

Pawar appeared before the agency for questioning in connection with a money laundering probe into the alleged Maharashtra State Cooperative Bank scam this morning.

"Satyamev Jayate (truth shall prevail). This is a period of struggle for us. There will be challenges in future, but we will overcome them. We will struggle, but continue to tread on the path of truth. This fight is for the pride of Maharashtra," Sule said.

So it was not surprising that Rohit Pawar was summoned for questioning by the ED. He recently took out a state-wide 'Sangharsh Yatra' to highlight the plight of farmers and youth, and it was getting a huge response, she said.

"It is said that the summons to him could be political vendetta," the NCP working president added.

Sule said the prevailing situation was a struggle for them. *—PTI*

Any probe against CM's daughter: Kerala HC

KOCHI, 24 JAN

Kerala High Court on Wednesday asked the Centre whether it intends to order a probe by the Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO) into the affairs of the software firm of Veena T, daughter of Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, and the Kochi-based company to which it was offering services.

Justice Devan Ramachandran posed the query to the central government after it filed a memo in court confirming that it has ordered an investigation under section 210 (investigation into affairs of company) of the Companies Act into the two companies.

However, the Centre had not followed the direction in the court's 15 January order to "obtain specific instructions, if any further action by the SFIO has been ordered or found warranted".

Meanwhile, the Cochin Minerals and Rutile Ltd (CMRL) -- whose payments to Veena's firm for services has snowballed into a political storm in the state -- told the court that since the ministry has ordered a probe under section 210 of the Companies Act, the relief sought in the petition has been satisfied. *—PTI*

2020 RIOTS

Delhi riots: Court acquits 3 of rioting, arson

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

A court here has acquitted three people of rioting and arson charges in a case related to the 2020 northeast Delhi riots, saying it was "not safe" to rely upon the testimonies of two police witnesses who had identified them.

Additional Sessions Judge Pulastya Pramachala was hearing a case against Akram, Mohammed Furkan and Mohammed Irshad who were accused of being part of a riotous mob that set ablaze a bookshop near Shiv Vihar Tiraha on 24 February, 2020.

"I find that it is not safe to rely upon the testimony of prosecution witness (PW) 2 (constable Pawan Kumar) and PW 7 (constable Amit) to assume the presence of all the accused persons herein in the mob," the judge said in a verdict pronounced on Tuesday.

Court observed that there was reliable evidence to prove that a riotous mob committed vandalism and arson *PHOTO: PTI*

"I find that charges levelled against all the three accused persons in this case are not proved beyond reasonable doubt. ," he added.

Though there was reliable evidence to prove that a riotous mob committed vandalism and arson, there were certain inconsistencies in the statements of the two constables, the court noted.It said that immediately after the incident, the duo did not make any statement or daily diary (DD) entry regarding having identified the accused persons. Both constables identified the accused persons after seeing a video clip only on 6 March, 2020, court said.There was, however, no clarity regarding the specific video clip being seen by the constables, the court said. *—PTI*

Khalid's bail hearing adjourned to 31 Jan

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

Supreme Court on Wednesday adjourned till 31 January the hearing on the bail plea of former JNU student Umar Khalid in a case lodged under anti-terror law UAPA over his alleged involvement in the conspiracy behind the northeast Delhi riots of February 2020. Bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and Ujjal Bhuyan deferred the matter as the bench was available only till lunch. Senior advocate CU Singh, submitted that he was ready to argue but unfortunately bench is rising after lunch. Matter was listed along with a batch of petitions challenging various provisions of the UAPA. Supreme Court judge Justice Prashant Kumar Mishra had on 9 August recused himself from hearing Khalid's plea. Khalid's petition challenging the 18 October, 2022 order of Delhi High Court, which had rejected his bail plea in the matter, had come up for hearing before a bench of Justices AS Bopanna and Mishra. *—PTI*

Boy injured as minor stabs him in neck with scissors

THANE, 24 JAN

A 14-year-old boy allegedly stabbed another teenager with a pair of scissors in his neck following an argument over playing cricket in Navi Mumbai, police said on Wednesday. The victim, who is 16 years old, was admitted to a hospital after getting injured in the incident that took place around 6.30 pm on Tuesday on a ground in Yadav Nagar area of Airoli, they said.

"The boys were playing cricket when an argument broke out between them. It escalated to such a level that the accused pulled out a pair of scissors and stabbed the victim in his neck in a fit of rage," an official of Rabale MIDC police station said.

The injured boy was rushed to a hospital, where he is currently undergoing treatment, he said. *—PTI*

Bomb threat for Delhi-bound flight turns out to be hoax

New Delhi, 24 Jan

SpiceJet on Wednesday received a bomb threat call for its Darbhanga-Delhi flight with more than 200 passengers that later turned out to be hoax and the aircraft landed safely at the airport in the national capital, officials said. "A call was received at the SpiceJet reservation office about a bomb in the aircraft operating flight SG 8496 from Darbhanga to Delhi. The flight landed safely at Delhi airport at 6pm and the aircraft was moved to an isolated bay," an airline spokesperson said in a statement. An airport source said a full emergency for the SpiceJet aircraft was declared at the airport in the evening. There were around 210 passengers onboard the aircraft, the source added. A Delhi police officer said an inquiry was conducted and it was found that the threat was bogus. The airline said passengers were deplaned safely and that the "aircraft is undergoing a thorough search by security agencies". *—PTI*

6 killed, 9 hurt after truck overturns in Odisha

BARIPADA, 24 JAN

At least six people died and nine others were injured on Wednesday after a truck carrying them overturned amid heavy rain in Mayurbhanj district, police said. The accident took place at Dharsuni ghat area on National Highway-49 in the morning, they said. The driver managed to escape from the spot, a police officer said. The injured were admitted to PRM Medical College and Hospital, Baripada, he added. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Namibian cheetah 'Jwala' gave birth to 4 cubs not 3

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

Namibian cheetah Jwala has given birth to four cubs at the Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh and not three, as reported previously, Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav said on Wednesday . The births, first reported on Tuesday, came just weeks after three cubs were born to another Namibian cheetah, Aasha. According to officials, the cubs were born to Jwala on 20 January. This is Jwala's second litter and comes after a gap of 10 months. Jwala (Namibian name Siyaya) had given birth to four cubs last March. Three of the cubs succumbed to extreme heat while the sole survivor is being raised under human care for future wilding. Yadav had on 3 January also shared information about the birth of three cubs to Aasha. The recent births have taken the number of cubs at the Kuno National Park to eight at present, with seven being born this month. *—PTI*

Gyanvapi ASI survey report to be given to Muslim, Hindu side

Varanasi court says that the report will not be made public

VARANASI, 24 JAN

A Varanasi court on Wednesday ruled that the ASI report on the Gyanvapi mosque complex survey will be given to both sides while making it clear that the report should not be made public, the counsel for the Hindu litigants said.

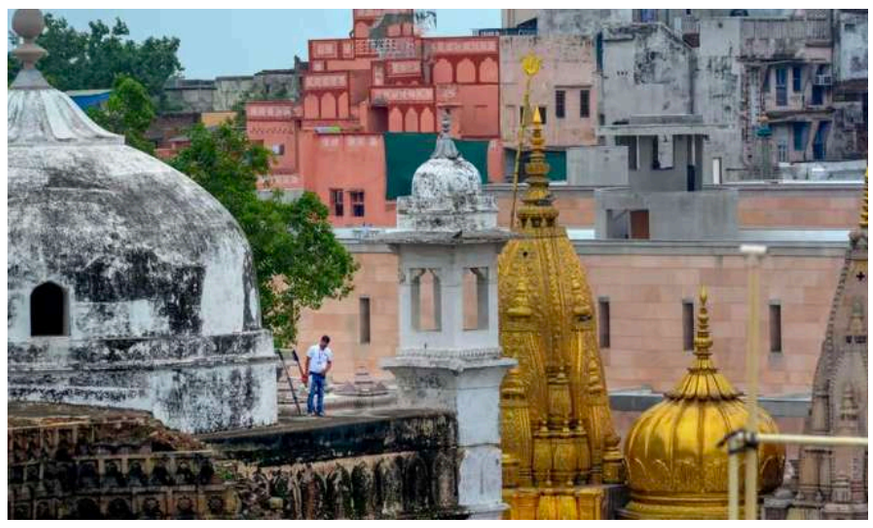
District Judge AK Vishvesh said both the Hindu and Muslim parties shall give an affidavit to keep the report with them and not make it public, said Madan Mohan Yadav, the counsel for Hindu side.

Following a 21 July order of the district court, the ASI carried out the scientific survey of the Gyanvapi premises, located next to the Kashi Vishwanath temple here, to determine whether the mosque was constructed over a pre-existing structure of a Hindu temple.

Yadav said the ASI submitted its survey report in the Fast Track Court of Justice Prashant Singh after which the matter came in the district judge court who ordered to provide hard copies of the report to the parties.

On Wednesday, the Muslim side pleaded in the district court that the survey report should be with the parties and not be made public.

On this, the court said while acquiring that report, the parties shall give an affidavit to keep the report with them and not make it public.



The survey was ordered by the court after the Hindu petitioners claimed the 17th-century mosque was constructed over a pre-existing temple *PHOTO: PTI*

The survey was ordered by the court after the Hindu petitioners claimed the 17th-century mosque was constructed over a pre-existing temple.

The ASI had submitted its survey report to the district court in a sealed cover on 18 December.

The ASI had on 3 January urged the court not to make its Gyanvapi complex survey report public for at least four more weeks, citing the 19 December judgment of the Allahabad High Court

ASI counsel Amit Shrivastava had told the district court that the high court had said in its order that, if necessary, the Civil Judge Senior Division Fast Track Court can order a survey of the Gyanvapi complex once again.

Therefore, if the survey report comes into the public domain now, a situation of contradiction may arise.

Therefore, four weeks should be given to open the survey report and make it available to the parties, the counsel had said. *—PTI*

HC JUDGE RECUSES FROM HEARING ON WAZUKHANA ROW

PRAYAGRAJ, 24 JAN

Allahabad High Court judge Justice Manish Kumar Nigam on Wednesday recused himself from hearing a plea challenging the Varanasi court's refusal to direct the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to undertake a survey of the 'wazukhana' area except the 'Shivling' inside the Gyanvapi mosque complex.

The court said the matter be placed before the court of chief justice for nomination of another judge and fixed 31 January as the next date of hearing.

The revision petition was filed by Rakhi Singh, who is one of the plaintiffs in the Shringar Gauri worshipping suit which is presently pending before the Varanasi district court.

The Varanasi district court had on 21 July last year directed the ASI to conduct a "detailed scientific survey" -- including excavations, wherever necessary -- to determine if the mosque located next to the Kashi Vishwanath temple was built upon a temple. *—PTI*

UNGA Prez lauds India for UNSC reform

UNITED NATIONS/ NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

Dennis Francis *PHOTO: PTI*

President of the UN General Assembly Dennis Francis has commended India for its engagement on UN Security Council reform, even as he acknowledged that progress on the issue has been "too slow".

"Well, I am acutely aware that India together with its G4 negotiating bloc on Security Council Reform, are clearly for a much more ambitious timeline to conclude the process within a period of two years," President of the 78th session of the UN General Assembly Dennis Francis told PTI in an exclusive interview on Tuesday.

Francis is on an official visit to India from 22 to 26 January and will hold bilateral discussions with the leadership and representatives of the Indian Government, and engage with civil society, leading think tanks, embark on field visits and participate in events related to sustainability, multilateralism, accessibility, and digital public infrastructure, among other engagements.

Francis agreed that progress on the issue of reform has been too slow.

"Ultimately, however, the intergovernmental negotiations are driven by Member States. It is up to them to demonstrate the political will to advance the reform process and the kind of change they wish to see. True political commitment is key to rebuilding trust and reviving the spirit of international cooperation to nurture our multilateral system.

"I commend India for its engagement on the matter," he said.

Francis noted that during the General Debate of the General Assembly last September, world leaders from every region across the globe stressed the need to modernize the UN, including revitalising the General Assembly and reforming the Security Council.

He said that to facilitate the ongoing intergovernmental negotiations, he has re-appointed the two co-chairs Austria and Kuwait to lead the process – and they are doing so admirably, thus offering the General Assembly much-needed guidance to advance this long overdue process. *—PTI*

SC cancels Wadhawans bail in DHFL loan scam case

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

Supreme Court on Wednesday cancelled the bail granted to former DHFL promoters Kapil Wadhawan and his brother Dheeraj in the multi-crore rupees bank loan scam case.

A bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and S C Sharma said the high court and the trial court committed error in granting bail to them.

It also directed that Wadhawans be taken into custody forthwith.

CBI had earlier assailed in the top court the statutory bail granted by courts below to Kapil Wadhawan and his brother Dheeraj.

Additional Solicitor General (ASG) SV Raju, appearing for CBI, had said that the chargesheet in the case was filed well within the 90 days statutory period and yet the statutory bail was granted to the accused.

PHOTO: PTI

Under the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), an accused becomes entitled for grant of statutory bail if the probe agency fails to file the charge sheet on conclusion of the investigation in a criminal case within 60 or 90 days period.

In this case, CBI filed the chargesheet on the 88th day after registration of the FIR and the trial court granted default bail to the accused and the Delhi High Court upheld the order, the law officer had said.

The CBI probe, relating to other aspects and against some other accused, was continuing and the courts below construed that the charge sheet filed was not final and granted default bail to the accused, the ASG had said, adding there were several judgements which support the plea of the probe agency.

Earlier on 30 May, last year Delhi High Court upheld the statutory bail granted to DHFL promoters in connection with a multi-crore rupees bank loan scam case. *—PTI*

TAMING THE BULL

People try to take control of a bull as they participate in the 'Jallikattu' event, at a newly-inaugurated arena named after former Tamil Nadu chief minister M Karunanidhi, in Madurai district on Wednesday *PHOTO: PTI*

Lioness hit by train in Guj dies; 3rd in a month

AMRELI, 24 JAN

A lioness hit by a train at a forest in Gujarat's Amreli four days back died during treatment on Wednesday, officials said.

This is the third death of a big cat this month after being hit by train in the district.

In the latest incident, the lioness was injured after getting hit by a passenger train near Doliyia village in Rajula taluka of Amreli on 20 January.

It was shifted to Shakkarbaug zoo in Junagadh district where it died on Wednesday while undergoing treatment, a forest department official said.

On 3 January, a lioness was injured after being hit by a goods train near Vijapadi village in Gir (East) forest division of Amreli.

It was rescued, provided with primary treatment and later shifted to Shakkarbaug zoo where it died on 11 January while undergoing treatment, an official earlier said.

On 12 January, a lion died after getting hit by a train near Amrutvel village in the same division of Amreli district, the official said.*—PTI*

- It was rescued, provided with primary treatment and later shifted to Shakkarbaug zoo where it died on 11 January while undergoing treatment.

2 arrested for attack on Ram procession in Thane

THANE, 24 JAN

Two people have been arrested by the police following an attack on a procession in Maharashtra's Thane earlier this week, officials said on Wednesday.

The incident occurred in Padgha area on Monday during the consecration of Lord Ram's idol at the Ayodhya temple.

This is the third incident reported in this district.

Earlier, members of two communities clashed during a vehicle rally organised in the Muslim-dominated Naya Nagar locality in the district on Sunday night following which 13 people were taken in custody.

On Tuesday, "illegal" roadside stalls in Naya Nagar area were demolished by the local civic body using bulldozers. The action was taken a day after Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis warned of strict action against rioters.

On Monday, a procession taken out in Mira Road area of Thane district on the occasion of the Ram temple idol consecration in Ayodhya was pelted with stones by miscreants.

Giving details of another incident in Borivali village of Padgha area, an official said the attack took place at around 8.30 pm on Monday.

The victims, travelling on motorcycles and on foot as part of the procession, were allegedly intercepted and assaulted by a group of nearly 15 armed individuals using iron rods, wooden sticks, and sharp objects.

The attackers also vandalised several motorcycles and tore a saffron flag bearing the image of Lord Ram, the official from Padgha police station said. *—PTI*

A procession taken out in Mira Road on the occasion of Ram temple consecration in Ayodhya was pelted with stones *PHOTO: PTI*

SC raps Centre over AMU amendment

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

Supreme Court on Wednesday expressed surprise over the Centre's stand that it does not accept the 1981 amendment to the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) Act, which effectively accorded minority status to the institution, and said the government has to stand by what Parliament has done.

A seven-judge constitution bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud, which is hearing arguments on the vexed question regarding the minority status of AMU, observed Parliament is an "eternal, indestructible body" under the Indian Union.

The bench, which also comprised Justices Sanjiv Khanna, Surya Kant, JB Pardiwala, Dipankar Datta, Manoj Misra and Satish Chandra Sharma, said the government has the option of taking the amendment route and amend the law again.

"This is an amendment by the Parliament (in 1981). Is the government accepting the amendment?" Justice Khanna asked. "I am not," Solicitor General Tushar Mehta responded.

Allahabad High Court had in January 2006 struck down the provision of the AMU (Amendment) Act, 1981 *PHOTO: AMU*

The law officer said he was not arguing a matter of "A versus B" and that he was before a seven-judge constitution bench answering constitutional questions.

"The amendment in question was subjected to challenge before the (Allahabad) High Court and there is a judgement declaring that it is unconstitutional for A, B, C, D grounds, and as a law officer, it is my right as well as my entitlement and duty to say that this view appears to be correct," he asserted.

The Allahabad High Court had in January 2006 struck down the provision of the AMU (Amendment) Act, 1981 by which the varsity was accorded minority status.

The CJI said this would be "radical" because a law officer would be then telling the court that "I don't abide by what Parliament has done".

Mehta said he was supporting the 2006 High Court verdict.

The top court had on 12 February, 2019 referred to a seven-judge bench the hugely contentious issue for adjudication. A similar reference was made earlier.

A five-judge constitution bench had in the S Azeez Basha versus Union of India case in 1967 held that since AMU was a central university, it cannot be considered a minority institution. However, it got back its minority status when Parliament passed the AMU (Amendment) Act in 1981. Congress-led UPA government at the Centre moved in appeal against the 2006 High Court order. The university also filed a separate petition against it. The NDA government spearheaded by the BJP told the apex court in 2016 that it will withdraw the appeal filed by the erstwhile UPA dispensation. *—PTI*

ROOM NOT SUICIDE PROOFED

NEET aspirant kills self in hostel room in Kota

KOTA, 24 JAN

A 19-year-old NEET aspirant from Uttar Pradesh allegedly committed suicide by hanging himself from a ceiling fan in his hostel room here, police said on Wednesday. It is the first case of suspected student suicide in the coaching hub this year.

The incident happened on Tuesday and the police have recovered the body from the victim's room in a hostel in New Rajiv Gandhi Nagar area of Kota. Kota Hostel Association president Naveen Mittal said the fan in the victim's room was not equipped with anti-suicide device in violation of guidelines set up for hostels in the district. Mittal said the association would blacklist the hostel and recommend the district administration to seize the hostel.

PHOTO: PIXBAY

He said there were still several hostels in the city where guidelines were not being followed.

Kota district authorities had ordered hostels to install a spring device on ceiling fans that foils suicide attempts.

Circle Officer of Jawahar Nagar area DSP Bhawani Singh said the deceased is Mohammed Jaid, 19, a resident of Moradabad district in Uttar Pradesh.

He was preparing for a second attempt at NEET at a coaching institute in the city.

Singh said the hostel warden informed the police after Jaid did not come out of his room till Tuesday. Around 10 pm, the police were informed, he added.

Last year, there were 26 student suicide cases in Kota, the highest figure so far in the coaching hub, where lakhs students reach from across the country every year for preparation of medical and engineering entrance exams. *—PTI*

FLYING HIGH

Children carrying Indian flags run near a mustard field ahead of the Republic Day in Nadia district, in West Bengal on Wednesday
PHOTO: PTI

Poverty debate: The truth behind the numbers

Around 248 million people living in the country escaped multidimensional poverty in the past nine years, according to a report by NITI Aayog, a government think tank.

The report suggests an 18 per cent decline in multidimensional poverty over the last nine years, with the share of people living in this condition declining from 29 per cent to 11 per cent.

The numbers would appear to show strong progress towards the government's goal of reducing multidimensional poverty to below 1 per cent , but some economists have raised some serious doubts over the use of the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) to make these claims, pointing out that the report does not paint the full picture.

The NITI Aayog report also claims that various government initiatives and welfare schemes have played a major role in mitigating different forms of deprivation
PHOTO: PTI

Does the MPI accurately reflect poverty?

Multidimensional poverty is based on health, education and living standards, each of which is given equal weight. The three categories are divided into 12 indicators.

Every household in India is given a score based on the 12 parameters and if a household has a deprivation score higher than 33 per cent , it is identified as multidimensionally poor.

The MPI, also called the Alkire-Foster method, was developed by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative to measure the levels and intensity of poverty.

India has added two new parameters — maternal health and bank accounts — to its national MPI.Some economists have argued that the devastating impact of Covid-19 on poverty is missing in the report's findings — while others point out that the number and share of the population below the consumption poverty line, the traditional method of estimating poverty globally, is absent.

'Lack of relevant data'

Mehrotra argues that the purpose of using the national MPI as the poverty indicator for India, despite an absence of consumption expenditure surveys between 2014 and 2022, is part of a political strategy.

"Real wages were stagnant for six years which had serious implications for consumption demands and this cannot be consistent with decline in poverty levels," said Mehrotra.

Lekha Chakraborty, Professor and chair at the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy, pointed out that any composite index has limitations as it is highly skewed based on the specific choice of variables, as well as the methodology used.

"Even the Human Development Index (HDI) constructed by UN every year is not free from conceptual and methodological criticisms as it is based on only selected three indicators and the way weightage is given to each of the variables," Chakraborty said.In her reckoning, data constraints thwart the meaningful constructions of such composite indicators and economists always use "proxy variables" or "extrapolate" the data. "Poverty is dynamic, like chasing a moving target — using MPI for the policy decisions will be highly controversial," she added.

Controversies surrounding poverty estimates

The NITI Aayog report also claims that various government initiatives and welfare schemes have played a major role in mitigating different forms of deprivation.

Arun Kumar, a retired professor of economics from Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University, told DW that the government's report needs reinterpretation.

"There are lacunae. The health and education indicators which have the highest contribution to MPI were most adversely impacted in the pandemic year 2020–21," Kumar said.

"Using data from the fifth National Family Health Survey of 2019-21 must have led to substantial errors in the deprivation index based on the survey, opening the conclusions of the NITI Aayog report to suspicion," Kumar said, referring to a large-scale, multi-round survey conducted in a representative sample of households throughout India.

Controversies surrounding poverty estimates in India are not new and have been a subject of debate in the past as well over the estimation and methodologies employed.Poverty numbers are important for assessing the economic progress of a country, and the government also needs these numbers to estimate the number of beneficiaries of schemes, such as the public distribution system for food, meant for poverty alleviation.In October last year, India ranked 111 out of a total of 125 countries in the Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2023, with its progress against hunger nearly halted since 2015, reflecting a global trend.

The government, though, contested India's performance, citing flawed methodology. In the index released, India has a score of 28.7, indicating a serious level of hunger.

—Courtesy, DW News

SALAR ساڈا

'Non-Covid deaths increased in people with diabetes'

Non-Covid-related deaths increased among people having diabetes because of pandemic-related disruptions, new research published in The Lancet Diabetes and Endocrinology journal has found.

The global review of studies comparing pre-pandemic and during-pandemic data found that the complication of sight loss in people with diabetes also increased. The negative impacts were most pronounced for women, younger people and racial and ethnic minority groups, it found.

The team of researchers, including those from the World Health Organization (WHO), looked at 138 studies - North America (39), Western Europe (39), Asia (17) and others from Eastern Europe, South America, Egypt, Australia and multiple regions - to examine the impacts of pandemic-related disruptions on the vulnerable diabetic population.

The research findings pointed to the importance of ensuring that all people with diabetes, especially those from the less advantaged groups, had consistent access to diabetes medication and care, the researchers said.

"We set out to answer the question, are you more at risk of dying from COVID and having serious disease if you have diabetes? And the data were clear - yes, you are," said co-lead author Jamie Hartmann-Boyce, an assistant professor of health policy and promotion in the School of Public Health and Health Sciences, University of Massachusetts Amherst, US.

Along with an increase in deaths, the researchers found a "startling" increase in diabetes-related admissions to pediatric ICUs, as well as a rise in cases of diabetic ketoacidosis (DKA) among children and adolescents. DKA is a potentially life-threatening complication of diabetes, characterised by vomiting, abdominal pain, taking deep gasps while breathing and increased urination.

> Type 1 diabetes, much less common than Type 2 diabetes, is an autoimmune disease usually diagnosed in childhood but can occur at any age. It is often detected at routine primary care visits. Regardless of the type of diabetes a person has, the disease requires self-management with diet, physical activity and consistent routines. People with Type 1 diabetes also require insulin to manage their blood sugar, the researchers said

The data on pediatric ICU admissions and DKA was probably the most striking thing coming out of the review, according to Hartmann-Boyce.

"It was very consistent across countries, and a pediatric ICU admission is a major event for kids and their families," she said.

The researchers pointed out that there were more new cases of Type 1 diabetes than expected, and that children freshly diagnosed with this type were much sicker during pandemic than during non-pandemic periods.

Type 1 diabetes, much less common than Type 2 diabetes, is an autoimmune disease usually diagnosed in childhood but can occur at any age. It is often detected at routine primary care visits.

Regardless of the type of diabetes a person has, the disease requires self-management with diet, physical activity and consistent routines. People with Type 1 diabetes also require insulin to manage their blood sugar, the researchers said.

Finding clear evidence that diabetes was a risk factor for death from Covid, the team then looked at the pandemic's indirect impacts on diabetes management such as reduced access to healthcare.

"We know that not getting your eyes screened regularly if you have diabetes is a problem and leads to more sight loss," said Hartmann-Boyce. "And we saw diabetes-related mortality and all-cause mortality increasing in England during the first wave that wasn't attributed to Covid-19 but was probably related to reduced access to health care and reduced health care utilisation."

She said she would like to update the review over the next decade, when more indirect pandemic impacts might become evident, as when blood sugars run high, there can be impacts that might not be seen for five or ten years down the line.

"One would hope that the people who do pandemic planning would take this information into account when thinking about the messaging and the care provided to people living with diabetes, should we have another pandemic," said Hartmann-Boyce.

—PTI

The global review of studies comparing pre-pandemic and during-pandemic data found that the complication of sight loss in people with diabetes also increased
PHOTO: PTI

LETTERS

Write to us at salar@salar.news

Adani Ports: TN villagers take on a billionaire's port plan

Thousands of villagers in Tamil Nadu are fighting a proposal to expand a port owned by billionaire Gautam Adani, one of the world's richest men.

The villagers, most of whom make a living through fishing, say the port expansion in Kattupalli - a small village located in Tiruvallur district along the Bay of Bengal coast - would submerge their lands and wreak havoc on their livelihoods. Adani Ports denies this.The 330-acre multi-purpose port - originally built by Indian conglomerate Larson & Toubro (L&T) - was acquired by Adani Ports in 2018.

The company later proposed to expand it more than 18-fold to an area of 6,110 acres by claiming portions of land along the coast.

According to the company's master plan, the expansion would increase the port's cargo capacity from 24.6 metric tonnes to 320 metric tonnes per year and develop new rail and road networks that would boost trade connectivity in the region.

But fisher people in at least 100 towns and villages located on the coast say this would gravely impact their work.

Experts say the port expansion could lead to massive coastal erosion in the region

The expansion has met with resistance from environmentalists as well, who claim the plan would lead to massive coastal erosion and a loss of biodiversity, especially of the indigenous fish species and the crabs, prawns and small turtles found in the region.

Environmentalist Meera Shah claims it could also "destroy" Pulicat lake, the second-largest saltwater lake in the country.

At the moment, the coastal stretch acts as a barrier between the lake and the Bay of Bengal. But the region has been experiencing widespread environmental pollution and coastal erosion in recent years, Shah added.A spokesperson from Adani Port, however, rejected the allegations and called them "misplaced".

A senior company official, who wanted to stay anonymous, said that locals "are not against the expansion of the port" and alleged the protests were being led by people "with ulterior motives for publicity".

Protests against port expansion first broke out in 2018 and have continued intermittently over the years ***PHOTO: BBC/ K SARAVANAN***

The port's expansion work was delayed after strong protests broke out in September

Protests against the port expansion first broke out in 2018 and have continued intermittently over the years.

The agitation intensified again in September, when the state government started the process of giving environmental clearance to the project, paving the way for the expansion work to begin.In the same month, the state's Pollution Control Board was forced to postpone a mandatory public hearing for the project amid strong protests.

According to the master plan, of the 6,110 acres needed for the expansion, 2,000 acres would be acquired from the sea, while the remaining land would be taken from the coastal area.

The company says it will reclaim parts of the sea by filling it with sand and include them in the port area. It also plans to deepen a portion of the sea and create a sea wall around it so that more ships can move along the coast.

The east coast of India - and the Tamil Nadu coast in particular - does not have the geographical landscape suitable for port construction, let alone an expansion, claims Dr Ilango Lakshmanan, a professor of hydrogeology at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Madras.

But some industry experts also say the expansion plan should not be dismissed entirely as it would benefit the state's economy and bring more employment.

"Kattupalli port was facing losses and started making profits only after the Adani takeover. An expansion would bring in more ships, which, in turn, will increase its economic scale," Valliappan Nagappan, the former president of Hindustan Chamber of Commerce, an independent trade organisation, said."However, the company must ensure that locals are well-compensated and relocated [if required] properly, without any impact on their livelihoods," Nagappan added. But protesters say they are not convinced.Women have been at the forefront of protests against the port expansionProtesters blame the Tamil Nadu government for not doing enough to safeguard their interests.

Many claim that before the state elections, Chief Minister MK Stalin repeatedly promised he would scrap the expansion plan, but nothing has happened since he came to power in 2021.

The BBC has reached out to the Chief Minister's office and the state's environment minister for comment.

This is not the first time that a port run by Adani Ports has invited protests.

In 2022, massive protests erupted in the fishing villages of the neighbouring state of Kerala against the construction of a port managed by the company in partnership with the local government.

It was later called off in December after the state government promised to pay each of those who were to be displaced a monthly compensation.At Kattupalli, port authorities have been wooing the local community by offering them free medical aid and promising them jobs.

"We are in touch with the villagers and communities around the port area and they are very much interested in the project and getting jobs," the unnamed Adani Ports senior executive cited above said.

The protesters, however, say that they are being cautious."If they want to give us medicines and take our land, we will not let it happen," one of them said.

—BBC News

Trump wins New Hampshire Republican primary

WASHINGTON, 24 JAN

Donald Trump has defeated Indian-American politician Nikki Haley in the New Hampshire Republican primary, continuing his march toward the party's presidential nomination and a possible final contest with President Joe Biden in the November 5 election.

With three-quarters of the votes counted, Trump, 77, was leading 55 per cent to 44 per cent. Although only two states have voted so far, Trump's victory in Tuesday's primary underscored his dominance of the Republican Party. The former president won a landslide in Iowa's caucuses last week.

Trump's victory is remarkable, considering he faces 91 criminal charges, including those related to seeking to overturn the 2020 presidential election. But Haley, 52, the former South Carolina governor and ambassador to the United Nations, vowed to fight on, giving a feisty speech to supporters on Tuesday night in which she questioned the former president's mental fitness and warned Republicans that renominating Trump would lead the party to defeat.

- Haley said when she started, there were 14 of them in the race, and she was polling at two per cent in the polls. "And now we're the last one standing next to Donald Trump," Haley said

Speaking after the results, Haley - who campaigned hard in the state - congratulated Trump, saying he "earned it". But she said the race was "far from over" with "dozens of states left to go". "I'm a fighter, and I'm scrappy," Haley, Trump's last remaining rival in the Republican nomination race, said.

Haley said when she started, there were 14 of them in the race, and she was polling at two per cent in the polls. "And now we're the last one standing next to Donald Trump," Haley said. "A Trump nomination is a Biden win and a Kamala Harris presidency," she said. "And the next one is my sweet state of South Carolina," she said.

Haley is hoping a strong showing in South Carolina could propel her into the March 5 Super Tuesday contests.

Trump said that Haley "had a very bad night" and was "doing a speech like she'd won" when she lost. Trump called her "delusional".

"Who the hell was that imposter that went up on that stage that went before and claimed victory?" he asked. *—PTI*

Donald Trump's win in New Hampshire has added to his momentum to secure the Republican presidential nomination **PHOTO: AP**

Nauru seals diplomatic ties with China

BEIJING, 24 JAN

China and Nauru have formally agreed to resume diplomatic relations after the tiny Pacific island severed ties with Taiwan last week. A signing ceremony to seal the renewal of relations took place in Beijing on Wednesday. Nauru deepened Taipei's diplomatic isolation by breaking ties on January 14 following Taiwanese elections that angered China. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Nauru counterpart Lionel Aingimea raised glasses after signing a document formalising the rapprochement. "Although China and Nauru are geographically far apart and separated by vast oceans, the friendship between the two peoples has a long history," said Wang.*—Al Jazeera*

PHOTO: X

Ukrainian-born new Miss Japan sparks debate

TOKYO, 24 JAN

"There have been racial barriers, and it has been challenging to be accepted as Japanese." That's what a tearful Carolina Shiino said in impeccable Japanese after she was crowned Miss Japan on Monday. The 26-year-old model, who was born in Ukraine, moved to Japan at the age of five and was raised in Nagoya. She is the first naturalised Japanese citizen to win the pageant, but her victory has re-ignited a debate on what it means to be Japanese. While some recognised her victory as a "sign of the times", others have said she does not look like what a "Miss Japan" should. Her win comes nearly 10 years after Ariana Miyamoto became the first bi-racial woman to be crowned Miss Japan in 2015. *—BBC News*

German train drivers go on strike for 6 days

BERLIN, 24 JAN

Germany's train drivers brought rail traffic to a standstill again early Wednesday when they began a six-day strike to push their demands in a rancorous dispute with the country's main railway operator over working hours and pay. The strike by the GDL union will affect passenger services and freight trains operated by state-owned Deutsche Bahn until 6 p.m. (1700 GMT) on Monday. The union held a three-day strike earlier this month and two walkouts last year which lasted up to 24 hours. On Wednesday, train travel across the country and in many cities ground to a halt again with commuters and other travellers struggling to find alternatives involving long-distance bus or car travel or flights. *—AP*

World's first IVF rhino pregnancy 'could save species'

BERLIN, 24 JAN

A fertility breakthrough has offered hope for saving the northern white rhino from extinction - there are only two of the animals left on the planet. Scientists have achieved the world's first IVF rhino pregnancy, successfully transferring a lab-created rhino embryo into a surrogate mother. The procedure was carried out with southern white rhinos, a closely related sub-species of northern whites. The next step is to repeat this with northern white embryos. "To achieve the first successful embryo transfer in a rhino is a huge step," said Susanne Holtze, a scientist at Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research in Germany, which is part of the Biorescue project, an international consortium trying to save this species. "But now I think with this achievement, we are very confident that we will be able to create northern white rhinos in the same manner and that we will be able to save the species." *—BBC News*

Russian army plane carrying 65 people crashes in Belgorod

Ria Novosti news agency said another 9 people were on the plane

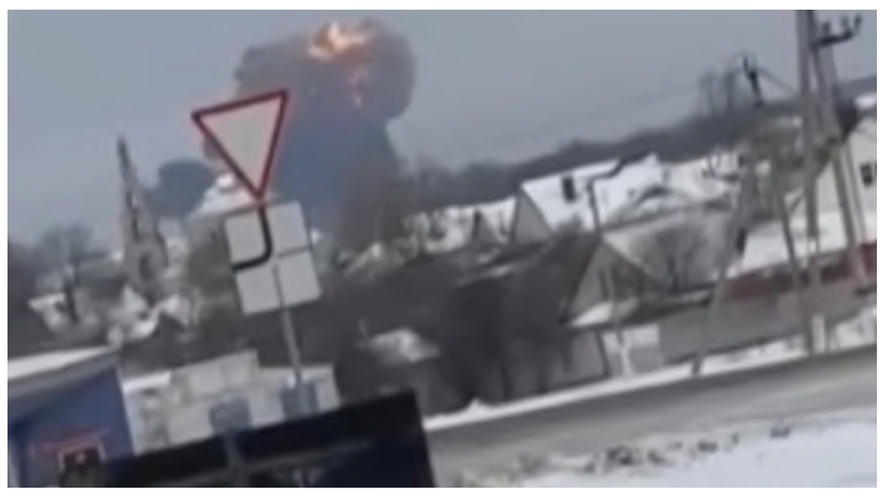
MOSCOW, 24 JAN

A Russian Ilyushin-76 military transport plane has crashed in the southern Belgorod region bordering Ukraine.

Russia's ministry of defence said 65 captured Ukrainian military were on the plane heading to Belgorod region for a prisoner exchange. None of the details surrounding those on board can be independently verified.

Ria Novosti news agency said another nine people were on the plane, including six crew. Ukraine's general staff, quoted by the Ukrainska Pravda website, said the plane was transporting missiles for Russia's S-300 air defence systems. It made no mention of prisoners of war.

Video shared on social media showed a plane going down followed by an explosion and a fireball near the village of Yablonovo, 70km (44 miles) to the north-east of the city of Belgorod, at around 11:00 local time (08:00 GMT). Some Ukrainian media suggested initially that the Il-76 may have been downed by Ukrainian forces, but those reports were later deleted.



Plane was seen going down near the village of Yablonovo in Belgorod **PHOTO: RUSSIAN TELEGRAM**

Ukraine's general staff told BBC Ukrainian that it did not have accurate information about the situation and that it was investigating the circumstances. Belgorod regional governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said he was aware of an "incident" but gave no further details.

Andrei Kartapolov, the chairman of Russia's parliamentary defence committee, claimed later that there had been a second plane in the air transporting 80 Ukrainian prisoners, although that plane had then changed course. "There can now be no talk of any other [prisoner] exchanges,"Kartapolov told Russian TV.

Russian Presidential spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the Kremlin was aware of the crash but refused to go in to details. A nationwide air raid alert was briefly in place across Ukraine shortly after news of the Il-76 crash emerged.

- Ukraine's general staff, quoted by the Ukrainska Pravda website, said the plane was transporting missiles for Russia's S-300 air defence systems. It made no mention of prisoners of war

Belgorod, which is located approximately 25 miles (40km) north of the border with Ukraine, has suffered dozens of casualties from air strikes and drones since the war in Ukraine began. In December, 25 people were killed and 100 were injured following an air strike - although Ukraine insisted that only military infrastructure had been targeted and blamed Russian air defences for fragments falling on the city. *—BBC News*

ISRAEL-GAZA WAR

Hundreds of patients stranded in main hospital

Thousands of people fled south from Khan Younis **PHOTO: PTI**

RAFAH, 24 JAN

Israeli forces battled Palestinian militants Wednesday near the main hospital in Gaza's second-largest city of Khan Younis, where medics said hundreds of patients and thousands of displaced people were unable to leave because of the fighting.

Israel has ordered residents to leave a swath of downtown Khan Younis that includes Nasser and two smaller hospitals as it pushes ahead with its 3-month-old offensive against Hamas. The United Nations humanitarian office said the area was home to 88,000 Palestinians and was hosting another 4,25,000 displaced by fighting elsewhere.

The aid group Doctors Without Borders said its staff was trapped inside Nasser Hospital with some 850 patients and thousands of displaced people because the surrounding roads were inaccessible or too dangerous.

Nasser Hospital is one of only two hospitals in southern Gaza that can still treat critically ill patients, the group said.

The Israeli military said its forces were battling militants inside Khan Younis after completing their encirclement of the city the day before. It said aircraft were striking targets as part of the operations there and had also targeted suspected militants in central and northern Gaza.

Thousands of people fled south from Khan Younis on Tuesday toward the town of Rafah.

Even there, Palestinians have found little safety, with Israel regularly carrying out strikes in and around the town. Palestinian witnesses said that in recent days Israeli soldiers and tanks had pushed into parts of Muwasi, a sandy area along the coast that Israel had declared a safe zone, where tens of thousands of people were living in tents without basic services. *—AP*

N Korea has fired several cruise missiles: S Korea

SEOUL, 24 JAN

South Korea's military said Wednesday that North Korea fired several cruise missiles into waters off its western coast, as an analysis of commercial satellite images suggested that the North has torn down a huge arch in its capital that symbolized reconciliation with war-divided rival South Korea.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un last week described the Pyongyang monument as an "eyesore" and called for its removal while declaring that the North was abandoning long-standing goals of a peaceful unification with South Korea and ordered a rewriting of the North's constitution to define the South as its most hostile foreign adversary.

The launches marked North Korea's second known launch event of the year, following a 14 January flight test-firing of the country's first solid-fuel intermediate range ballistic missile, which reflected its efforts to advance its lineup of weapons targeting US military bases in Japan and Guam.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un observes what it says the test-firing of strategic cruisemissiles **PHOTO: AP**

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said Wednesday that the US and South Korean militaries were analysing the latest launches. It did not immediately confirm the exact number of missiles fired or their specific flight details. "Our military has increased surveillance and vigilance and is closely coordinating with the United States while monitoring for further signs and activity from North Korea," the Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement. *—AP*

RED SEA FURY

US carries out new strikes on Houthis in Yemen

WASHINGTON, 24 JAN

The United States military launched new strikes in Yemen against Houthi antiship missiles and facilities in Iraq targeting Iran-backed armed groups it says were behind missile and drone attacks on US troops in Iraq and Syria.

The strikes in Yemen, which took place at 2:30am on Wednesday (23:30 GMT on Tuesday) are the latest attacks against the Iran-aligned group which has been attacking shipping in the Red Sea and has warned it would not stop.

"US forces identified the missiles in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen and determined that they presented an imminent threat to merchant vessels and the US Navy ships in the region," the military's Central Command said.

The Houthis, who control the most populous parts of Yemen and support Hamas, say their attacks are in solidarity with Palestinians amid Israel's relentless bombardment of the Gaza Strip.

US carries out new strikes against Houthis in Yemen **PHOTO: ANI**

The Palestinian health ministry says more than 25,000 people have been killed and more than 63,000 wounded in Israeli attacks on Gaza following Hamas's assault in Israel on 7 October, which Israeli officials say killed 1,139 people.

Since the US and its allies started attacking Houthi military sites on 11 January, the Pentagon says it has destroyed or degraded more than 25 missile launch and deployment facilities, more than 20 missiles.

Strikes in Iraq

Separately on Wednesday, the US targeted sites used by Iran-backed armed groups in Iraq, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin announced, days after US troops in the country were attacked.

On Saturday, four US personnel suffered traumatic brain injuries after the Ain al-Asad airbase in western Iraq was hit by multiple ballistic missiles and rockets allegedly fired by Iranian-backed militants. *—Al Jazeera*

Mongolia: Road mishap kills 6 and injures 11

ULAANBAATAR, 24 JAN

A truck carrying 60 tons of liquefied natural gas and a car collided at an intersection in the Mongolian capital early Wednesday, causing a massive fireball and a series of explosions that killed three firefighters and injured 11 people, officials said.

Images showed the huge blaze at the scene of the crash outside a shopping center, close to an apartment building and an international school in Ulaanbaatar.

The 12-story apartment building caught fire, with firefighters working until early morning to extinguish the flames. Mongolia's Emergency Management Office told The Associated Press that a total of three explosions occurred after the crash, the last of which killed the three firefighters.

- The authority expressed condolences to the firefighters' families in a Facebook post

The authority expressed condolences to the firefighters' families in a Facebook post.

Ten people were taken to a hospital to be treated for burns and another person was being treated at a poison centre, authorities said. Forty-three people were evacuated from the burning apartment building. More than two dozen cars caught fire in the explosions. *—AP*

China curbs Reserve banks to lift economy

BANGKOK, 24 JAN

China's central bank said Wednesday it will cut the ratio of reserves banks must hold to help boost the slowing economy.

The announcement by the People's Bank of China prompted a surge in share prices in Chinese markets, with Hong Kong's benchmark jumping 3.6%. Chinese stock markets have languished in recent months as investors pulled money out, discouraged by a faltering recovery from the shocks of the Covid-19 pandemic.

A sell-off earlier this week was followed by unconfirmed reports that the government planned to get state-owned investment companies to funnel offshore funds into the markets to help staunch the losses. The central bank's moves appear to be part of a concerted effort to stabilise the markets and instill greater confidence in the outlook for the world's second-largest economy.

Central bank Gov Pan Gongsheng said the deposit reserve requirement would be cut by 0.5% as of 5 February. Pan said that would inject about 1 trillion yuan ($141 billion) into the economy. As of December, the reserve requirement ratio was 7.4%. Pan told reporters in Beijing that the central bank also plans to issue a policy soon on lending to property developers to help support the industry. *—AP*

TURMOIL ACROSS COUNTRY

Myanmar army fights militant monk

NAYPYIDAW, 24 JAN

Last Tuesday, a noisy crowd of several hundred people stood in the small main square of Pyin Oo Lwin, a popular Myanmar hill town, to hear a bespectacled monk make a startling suggestion.

Min Aung Hlaing, the country's military ruler, should step aside, he said, and let his deputy General Soe Win take over. The man who led the 2021 coup against the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi, provoking a catastrophic civil war, has faced plenty of international censure, and is loathed by much of Myanmar's population.

This though was criticism from an unusual quarter.

Pauk Ko Taw declined to be interviewed **PHOTO: BBC/FACEBOOK**

The monk, Pauk Ko Taw, is part of an ultra-nationalist fringe of the Buddhist clergy, which has until now been staunchly behind the military junta. But a series of crushing defeats suffered by the army at the hands of ethnic insurgents in recent weeks has prompted Min Aung Hlaing's one-time cheerleaders to reconsider.

"Look at Soe Win's face," Pauk Ko Taw said to the crowd. "That's the face of a real soldier. Min Aung Hlaing is not coping. He should move to a civilian role."

It is not clear what kind of backing Pauk Ko Taw has in the armed forces. But his comments echo those made by other junta supporters, who are increasingly frustrated by the seeming inability of Myanmar's military leaders to turn the tide against their opponents. Pauk Ko Taw declined to be interviewed by BBC Burmese.

That he chose to give his speech in Pyin Oo Lwin will have added weight to it. The one-time British colonial hill-station is now home to the prestigious Defence Services Academy, where the army's top brass are trained. *—BBC News*

Pak polls: Launch campaign or lose tickets, says Imran

ISLAMABAD, 24 JAN

Pakistan's jailed former prime minister Imran Khan has warned his party candidates to launch their poll campaigns peacefully, failing which their tickets to contest the February 8 elections will be cancelled, according to a media report on Wednesday.

The 71-year-old Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder made the statement while talking to reporters at Adiala jail in Rawalpindi on Tuesday after the hearing of the cipher case, the Geo News reported.

PTI-backed candidates are struggling to launch their election campaign amid a crackdown on the party supporters. *—PTI*

Rupee settles 2 paise higher at 83.13 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 24 JAN

Rupee stayed range-bound and settled 2 paise (provisional) higher at 83.13 against the US dollar on Wednesday.Forex traders said the rupee is trading in a narrow range as positive domestic markets and a soft US dollar supported the rupee while rising crude oil prices and foreign fund outflows capped gains.At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.15 against the greenback. The unit oscillated between an intraday low of 83.16 and a high of 83.11 against the greenback and finally settled at 83.13 against the dollar, higher by 2 paise (provisional) from its previous close.On Tuesday, the rupee had settled at 83.15 against the US dollar."We expect the rupee to trade with a slight positive bias as the US Dollar has softened ahead of PMI data and gains in the Japanese Yen. Markets expect PMI data to be better than the previous month's reading. However, concerns over the Red Sea region and elevated crude oil prices may cap the sharp upside," said Anuj Choudhary Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. *—PTI*

Gold falls ₹50; silver jumps ₹300

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

Gold prices fell Rs 50 to Rs 63,200 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday, according to HDFC Securities.In the previous trade, the precious metal had closed at Rs 63,250 per 10 grams. However, silver jumped Rs 300 to Rs 76,000 per kilogram while it had settled at Rs 75,700 per kilogram in the previous close."Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 63,200 per 10 grams, down by Rs 50, taking cues from the international market," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said.In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,026 per ounce, down USD 2 from the previous close.However, silver was trading higher at USD 22.70 per ounce.Gold was trading lower on Wednesday as traders remained cautious ahead of US macro data, including fourth-quarter GDP data due on Thursday, that could offer further insights into the trajectory of Federal Reserve's monetary policy.*—PTI*

Karnataka Bank posts all-time high profit

MANGALURU, 24 JAN

Mangaluru-headquartered Karnataka Bank has posted an all-time high net profit of Rs 1,032.04 crore for the nine months of the financial year ending December 2023, as against Rs 826.49 crore earned during the corresponding period last year. The bank has registered a year-on-year growth of 25 percent during the period. For Q3FY of 2023-24, the bank posted a net profit of Rs 331.08 crore with a growth rate of 10.11 percent as against Rs 300.68 crore during the corresponding period previous year, a bank release said.Meeting of the board held at Mangaluru approved the financial results for quarter and nine months period ended 31 December,2023.*—PTI*

Indus Towers stock jumps over 7 pc in mid-session trade

New Delhi, 24 Jan

Shares of telecommunication company Indus Towers jumped more than 7 per cent in the mid-trading session on Wednesday, a day after it posted a profit of Rs 1,541 crore for the December quarter.The company's scrip climbed 7.25 per cent to Rs 233 on the BSE.
On the NSE, shares of Indus Towers rallied 7.19 per cent to trade at Rs 232.70 per piece.In the mid-trading session on Wednesday, the 30-share BSE Sensex was trading with a gain of 17.49 points, or 0.02 per cent at 70,388.04 and NSE Nifty rose 0.13 per cent at 21,266 points.
—PTI

Sensex surges 690 points to reclaim 71,000 level

NSE Nifty also closed 215.15 points or 1.01 per cent higher

MUMBAI, 24 JAN

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded sharply by 1 per cent on Wednesday after sliding for the past two sessions, propelled by bargain hunting in metal, commodity and telecom stocks.

Trading through a patchy track in the opening session, the 30-share BSE Sensex gradually gained ground and jumped 689.76 points, or 0.98 per cent, to settle at 71,060.31. The benchmark moved between an intra-day high of 71,149.61 and a low of 70,001.60.

The broader NSE Nifty also closed 215.15 points or 1.01 per cent higher at 21,453.95.

Among the Sensex firms, major winners included Tata Steel, rising 3.77 per cent, followed by HCL Tech, which gained 3.62 per cent.

IndusInd Bank and PowerGrid closed with a gain of 3,60 and 3.34 per cent, respectively. Other gainers were Tech Mahindra, Hindustan Unilever, Bajaj Finserve and Bharti Airtel, among others.

On the other hand, ICICI Bank, Axis Bank, Asian Paints, Bajaj Finance and TCS were the only laggards, sliding up to 2.94 per cent.

Major winners included Tata Steel, rising 3.77 per cent, followed by HCL Tech *PHOTO: PTI*

A total of 25 stocks of the 30-share benchmark settled in green, while 43 constituents of the NSE Nifty witnessed gains.

Elsewhere in Asia, Japan's Nikkei 225 lost 0.80 per cent, and Hong Kong's Hang Seng gained sharply by 3.56 per cent. China's Shanghai Composite also ended 1.80 per cent higher.

European markets were higher on Wednesday, with Germany's DAX and CAC 40 of France gaining 1.00 per cent and 0.58 per cent. London's FTSE 100 rose 0.29 per cent.In the US markets, the Dow closed 0.25 per cent lower on Tuesday, while the S&P 500 settled 0.29 per cent higher and tech-heavy Nasdaq closed the session 0.43 per cent higher.Meanwhile, Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, were trading higher by 0.58 per cent to USD 80.01 per barrel on Wednesday.On Tuesday, Sensex fell 1,053.10 points or 1.47 per cent to settle at 70,370.55. Nifty also declined 330.15 points or 1.53 per cent to close at 21,241.65.Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Tuesday, as they offloaded shares worth Rs 3,115.39 crore, according to exchange data. *—PTI*

- A total of 25 stocks of the 30-share benchmark settled in green, while 43 constituents of the NSE Nifty witnessed gains

Farm sector to get huge money boost

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

Nirmala Sitharaman *PHOTO: PTI*

The government is likely to significantly enhance allocation for key farm sector schemes and push credit in the interim Budget to boost rural economy as growth in the agriculture sector is projected to decelerate to 1.8 per cent in 2023-24 from 4 per cent a year ago.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is scheduled to present the interim Budget on 1 February, which will be the last major economic document of the Narendra Modi-led government ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

In the 2019 interim Budget ahead of the 2019 general elections, the government announced PM-Kisan Samman Nidhi, under which up to Rs 6,000 financial assistance is provided to small farmers annually. In the election year, there are expectations that the quantum of assistance may increase in the upcoming Budget.

Also, the government is likely to announce a substantial increase in the agricultural credit target to Rs 22-25 lakh crore for the next fiscal and ensure every eligible farmer has access to institutional credit. The government's agri-credit target is Rs 20 lakh crore for the ongoing fiscal.

In the current fiscal, about 82 per cent of the agri-credit target of Rs 20 lakh crore has been achieved till December 2023.

Director General of industry body CII Chandrajit Banerjee said agriculture and rural segments should be a key priority to drive inclusive growth in the interim Budget.

"In agriculture, warehousing must be promoted to reduce wastage. Coverage of electronic Negotiable Warehouse Receipts (eNWRs) must be increased, and we have recommended allowing them to be used to access finance, trading, and settlement of trade," he said.

The industry chamber also made a case for moving towards dispensing fertilizer subsidies directly as cash transfers to farmers.

India needs budgetary support and stronger Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) to optimise operations and tap into emerging market opportunities, Gaurav Manchanda, Founder & Managing Director of The Organic World, said.

"Higher farm insurance outlays, greater investment in rural employment schemes, better irrigation facilities, and improved rural infrastructure can make a huge difference," he said. *—PTI*

- The government is likely to announce a substantial increase in the agricultural credit target to Rs 22-25 lakh crore for the next fiscal

₹1.1 crore penalty slapped on Air India

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

Aviation watchdog DGCA has imposed a penalty of Rs 1.10 crore on Air India for safety violations with respect to operations of leased Boeing 777 planes to the US.

This is the second time in a week that the regulator has penalised Air India.

The regulator had received a complaint from a former Air India pilot alleging that the airline operated Boeing 777 planes to the US without having the required system of emergency oxygen supply.

A comprehensive investigation into the matter was carried out by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), which also issued a show cause notice to the airline.

"Since the said operations of the leased aircraft were not in line with regulatory/ OEM (Original Equipment Manufacturer) performance limits, DGCA has initiated enforcement action and imposed a penalty of Rs 1.10 crore on Air India," DGCA said in a release on Wednesday.

There was no immediate comment from Air India on the penalty.

According to the release, the regulator carried out a detailed probe after receiving a voluntary safety report from an airline employee alleging safety violations of flights operated by Air India on certain long range terrain critical routes.

Since the investigation prima facie revealed non-compliance by the airline, DGCA said a show cause notice was issued to Air India, it added.

Specific details about the penalty on the Air Inida were not disclosed in the release. *—PTI*

The adoption of gasification technology is expected to reduce the reliance on imports of natural gas *PHOTO: PTI*

₹8.5K cr incentive for coal projects

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved a Rs 8,500 crore incentive scheme for coal gasification projects, sources said.The adoption of gasification technology in India is expected to reduce the country's reliance on imports of natural gas, methanol, ammonia and other essential products.The cabinet has given its go-ahead to Rs 8,500 crore incentive scheme for coal gasification projects, the sources said.The government is targeting to gasify 100 million tonnes (MT) of coal by 2030.In gasification process, coal is partially oxidised by air, oxygen, steam, or carbon dioxide under controlled conditions to produce a liquid fuel known as syngas. Syngas or synthesis gas can be used for power generation and to make methanol as well. *—PTI*

Expectations on new norms will not impact FPIs: Report

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

Market regulator Sebi does not expect a large number of foreign portfolio investors to be impacted by the new beneficial ownership disclosure norms, according to sources. The norms are set to come into effect from 1 February and against this backdrop, the equity market has witnessed significant volatility, with the benchmark Sensex crashing over 1,000 points on Tuesday after shedding early intraday gains. The sources in the know said FPIs which may be required to provide enhanced disclosures are expected to be significantly less than estimated in the consultation paper and the Sebi board note of October 2023.

"Exemption from enhanced disclosures have been provided to FPIs that are SWFs (Sovereign Wealth Funds), listed companies on certain global exchanges, public retail funds, and other regulated pooled investment vehicles with diversified global holdings," one of the sources said on Wednesday. Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) have been dumping shares in recent trading sessions.

In the past four trading days alone, FPIs have sold shares worth over Rs 27,000 crore after pumping in huge money that had also pushed the market indices to record highs. *—PTI*

Burmans get CCI nod to buy Religare stake

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

The Competition Commission of India has approved the acquisition of 31.27 per cent of additional stake in Religare Enterprises by four entities of Dabur India promoter Burman family, enabling them to become majority owners in the financial services firm.

Icra allowed the four entities to acquire Religare's 5.27 per cent through stock market purchase and another 26 per cent through an open offer.The four entities -- Puran Associates Pvt Ltd, M.B. Finmart Pvt Ltd, VIC Enterprises Pvt Ltd, and Milky Investment and Trading Company-- are controlled by the Burman family, CCI said in a release on Tuesday.

"The proposed combination envisages the acquisition of 5.27% of the total issued and outstanding equity share capital of Religare Enterprises Limited (Religare) through open market purchases, and an open offer for up to 26% of the Total Expanded Voting Share Capital of Religare... by Puran Associates Private Limited, M.B. Finmart Private Limited, and VIC Enterprises Private Limited, Milky Investment and Trading Company," the CCI release said.Religare is engaged in the financial services business through its subsidiaries and operating entities. Burman family has investments across various sectors such as insurance and FMCG, among others. *—PTI*

Hitachi India posts multi-fold rise in Q3

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

Hitachi Energy India posted a multi-fold jump in its net profit at Rs 23 crore for the quarter ended December 31, 2023 on higher revenues."Profit after tax (net profit) was at Rs 23 crore (in October-December 2023), clocking a recovery of 400 per cent year-on-year on a low base," a company statement said.
In the October-December period of 2022, Hitachi Energy India had reported a net profit of Rs 4.6 crore."Technologies and market innovations are playing a pivotal role in navigating the complexities of the evolving energy landscape. These have further expedited the pace of energy transition across sectors, helping us sustain our growth this quarter," said N Venu, Managing Director and CEO, Hitachi Energy India Ltd in the statement.

The company's revenues increased to Rs 1,276.4 crore in the quarter under review, from Rs 1,041 crore in the same period a year ago. *—PTI*

Bilateral trade with Russia to increase: Min

CHENNAI, 24 JAN

Bilateral trade between India and Russia was at USD 50 billion in the last financial year and is expected to increase this year, said Union Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways, Sarbananda Sonowal, here on Wednesday.

The Eastern Maritime Corridor between the ports on the east coast of India and the Far East region of Russia promises "immense potential" to unlock new trade opportunities, he said.

He was speaking at a conference on 'Operationalising Eastern Maritime Corridor' which was attended by a delegation from Moscow led by A Yu Bobrakov, Deputy Minister for the Development of the Far East and the Arctic of the Russian Federation, among others.

While welcoming the visiting delegates, Sonowal said the India-Russia partnership is "strong and steady" building upon strategic convergence, geo-political interests and mutually beneficial cooperation.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi remains engaged with President Putin through telephonic conversation. The latest discussion took place on 15 January," he said.

India and Russia continue to interact at the Ministerial and official levels; most recently, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar had a very successful visit to Russia in December 2023, he said.

"Our bilateral partnership has expanded to become truly multi-faceted and encompasses cooperation in military, security, science and technology. Our bilateral trade has registered rapid growth in the last financial year, where it amounted to USD 50 billion, and it is likely to be even more this year," he said.

However, the minister did not reveal any figures on how much trade is expected to grow between the two countries.

Observing that the 'Eastern Maritime Corridor' is an example of the 'special' and 'privileged' nature of the ties between the two countries, Sonowal recalled his visit to Vladivostok in 2023 to take part in the 8th Eastern Economic Forum. *—PTI*

Bank credit expansion projected at 15%: Icra

MUMBAI, 24 JAN

Rating agency Icra on Wednesday revised upward its bank credit growth projection at 14.9-15.3 per cent this fiscal, but said the same will lose steam and grow at 12 per cent next fiscal.

At 14.9-15.3 per cent, the system level credit expansion in absolute terms will be Rs 20.4-20.9 lakh crore, it said, adding this will be the highest ever incremental bank credit growth and would surpass the previous high of Rs 18.2 lakh crore recorded in FY23 at a growth rate of 15.4 per cent.

The agency had earlier estimated a 12.8-13 per cent credit demand for this fiscal.

However, citing the rising global headwinds and also the higher base coupled with the challenges in deposit mobilisation, the agency said it expects the rate of incremental credit expansion to slow down to Rs 19-20.5 lakh crore or 11.7-12.6 per cent in FY25.

Weaker export demand in certain sectors, softer commodity prices, and challenges in deposit mobilisation could temper bank credit growth in FY2025, it added.

PHOTO: PTI

- The agency had earlier estimated a 12.8-13 per cent credit demand for this fiscal

Further, the agency estimates corporate bond issuances to reach Rs 9.6-9.9 lakh crore in FY24, crossing the record level of Rs 8.7 lakh crore in FY23.

Incremental bank credit growth touched nearly Rs 16.9 lakh crore in the first nine months of FY24 far outpacing the Rs 14.1 lakh crore expansion in the corresponding period last year. This was driven by the retail segment and non-bank finance companies, with annual growth of 33 per cent and 23 per cent, respectively, as of November 18, 2023.

While incremental bank credit growth remained reasonably strong at Rs 6.1 lakh crore in Q3 and Rs 10.8 lakh crore in the first half of FY24, it was lower by Rs 1.3 lakh crore in December 2023 against Rs 2 lakh crore during December 2022.

This bank credit growth is also going to be accompanied by a record incremental deposit mobilisation in FY24, with the highest ever build-up at Rs 21.7-22.3 lakh crore (Rs 19.2 lakh crore for the nine-month period of FY24 and Rs 15.8 lakh crore in FY23).

This was driven by a record accretion of Rs 11.2 lakh crore in Q1 FY24, partially supported by withdrawal of the Rs 2,000 currency note. *—PTI*

UP TO 50%

'Govt aiming to increase scrap share in steel'

KOLKATA, 24 JAN

Government is aiming to increase the share of scrap in steel making process to 50 per cent by 2047, Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said on Wednesday.

The steel minister emphasised on usage of scrap in steel making as manufacturing the metal through scrap and other waste products is less polluting and termed it as a step "towards green steel initiative".

"As per our ministry's vision 2047 document, in the next 25 years, the percentage of scrap will be 50 per cent along with the balance 50 per cent as iron ore," Scindia said at the 11th International Material Recycling Conference in Kolkata.

Use of scrap not only reduces the use of natural resources but also cuts emission by 25 per cent in comparison to the primary route of steelmaking, the minister said addressing through a video message.

Union minister Jyotiraditya Scindia *PHOTO: PTI*

More scrap would be needed in the future to reduce emission and produce green steel and for this to happen there is a need for environment-friendly formal scrapping centres, Scindia added.

Today, around 25 million tonnes of scrap are produced in the country and around 5 million tonnes are imported, he said.

Besides, various waste byproducts generated during mining and steel making can also be effectively used in cement manufacturing, road construction and agriculture, the minister said.

Scindia further said, "Our steel sector is known as a hard to abate sector...with an emissions intensity of 2.55 tonne of CO_2 per tonne of crude steel produced."

At present, scrap contributes around 30-35 per cent to India's overall steel production, Sanjay Mehta, President, Material Recycling Association of India (MRAI), said. *—PTI*

ZVEREV MOVE INTO SEMIS

AUS OPEN: Qinwen Zheng from China qualifies for 1st semifinal

MELBOURNE, 24 JAN

Alexander Zverev made no mistake with his second chance to close out a win over No. 2-ranked Carlos Alcaraz on Wednesday night and moved into an Australian Open semifinal against two-time finalist Daniil Medvedev.

The sixth-seeded Zverev was a up a break in the third set at 5-3 and missed a chance to serve it out but the Olympic champion didn't blink when he got another chance in the fourth, finishing off a 6-1, 6-3, 6-7 (2), 6-4 victory.

It was Zverev's first win over a top-5 player at a Grand Slam, and the reward was a spot in the semis for the seventh time at a major. He raced through the first set in 29 minutes and two service breaks in the second gave him a 2-0 lead.

"Look, I'm playing one of the best players in the world, especially over the last two years," Zverev said. "when you're up 6-1, 6-3, 5-2, you start thinking. I mean, we're all human.

Medvedev vs Hurkacz

Medvedev, a two-time finalist in Australia, outlasted ninth-seeded Hubert Hurkacz 7-6 (4), 2-6, 6-3, 5-7, 6-4 to make it to the semifinals at Melbourne Park for the third time in four years. Medvedev's celebration was more like a sigh of relief. He led 4-2 in the fourth set but No 9 Hurkacz rallied to force a fifth and took it to a grueling four hours. "I'm so destroyed right now," Medvedev, said.

Zheng vs Kalinskaya

No 12-seeded Zheng Qinwen and Ukrainian qualifier Dayana Yastremska won women's quarterfinals on Day 11 and will play their first Grand Slam semi when they meet after a night sleep.

The women's semifinal lineup was completed when Zheng won 10 of the last 11 games to fend off Anna Kalinskaya 6-7 (4), 6-3, 6-1. Defending champion Aryna Sabalenka and US Open winner Coco Gauff will meet in the other semifinal.

Zheng, regained control midway through the second set after Kalinskaya won six of the last seven points to take the first set in a tiebreaker. "Really excited. First time for me," in the semifinals, Zheng said. "Of course I'm proud of myself. But this is just the beginning — I still need to play tomorrow."

Noskova vs Yastremska

Yastremska beat beat Linda Noskova 6-3, 6-4. No 93-ranked Yastremska won three matches in the qualifying tournament and became only the second qualifier to reach the women's singles semis in Australia in the Open era.

After the match, Yastremska wrote a message on a TV camera lens and later explained it was "about the Ukrainian fighters, that I'm very proud of them. They really deserve a huge respect."

—AP

Bopanna, set to become oldest World Number 1

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

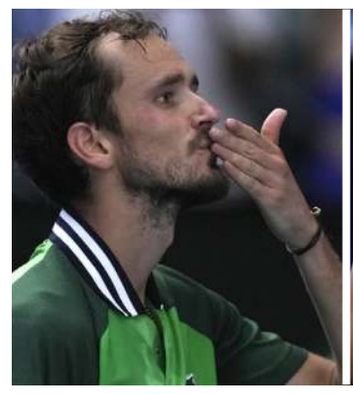
Rohan Bopanna **PHOTO: X**

Bopanna is set to become the oldest tennis player to achieve the world No 1 ranking in men's doubles after reaching the semifinals of the Australian Open along with his partner Matthew Ebden of Australia here on Wednesday.

The 43-year-old, who had entered the tournament with a career-high ranking of world No. 3, and Ebden recorded a comfortable 6-4 7-6(5) win over sixth seeded Argentinian duo of Máximo González and Andrés Molteni in the quarterfinals that lasted an hour and 46 minutes here.

Rohan Bopanna feels that his ascent to world No 1 in doubles rankings at the twilight of his career is perfect boost that Indian tennis needed just when it was falling off the radar. Bopanna will be crowned the new numero uno spot on Monday after the end of the tournament.

"It (the feat) means a lot not to just me but for Indian tennis also. You need something to inspire the next generation. Sumit (Nagal) also had a great Australian Open. He won a round. "Extremely proud of this (world no 1 ranking in men's doubles). It's a special moment. Lot of sacrifices have gone into this. My coaches, family everyone." Bopanna told PTI. *—PTI*



Alexander Zverev celebrates after defeating Carlos Alcaraz; Daniil Medvedev of Russia blowoing kisses after defeating Hubert Hurkazcz; Zheng Qinwen reacts after defeating Anna Kalinskaya of Russia; Dayana Yastremska of Ukraine plays a forehead return to Linda Noskova of the Czech Republic during their quarterfinal matches at Melbourne Park in Australia on Wednesday **PHOTOS: AP**

ATP CHALLENGER TOURNAMENT: SUMIT NAGAL GETS DIRECT ENTRY INTO BENGALURU OPEN

BENGALURU, 24 JAN

Sumit Nagal on Wednesday became the only Indian to earn a direct entry into the Bengaluru Open, an ATP Challenger tournament, to be held here from 10 February. Last week, Nagal scripted history as he became only the second Indian male player after Somdev Devvarman to advance to the second round of the Australian Open, after he defeated world no 27 Alexander Bublik in his opener.

With the cut-off for the Bengaluru Open being at 257, the 137th-ranked Nagal will be among the 21 players from 11 countries to qualify for the main draw of the ATP 100 Challenger tournament.

"This edition is expected to be high on challenges, there are many strong contenders, making this edition more challenging and definitely exciting to watch. My journey continues, and I am enthusiastic about going back on court and making a lasting impact," Nagal, who won Bengaluru Open in 2017, said. *—PTI*

KALINGA SUPER CUP

East Bengal FC stormed into their second final of the season as they eased past Jamshedpur FC 2-0 in semi-finals of the Kalinga Super Cup at Kalinga Stadium on Wednesday **PHOTO: X/EAST BENGAL**

India play out 2-2 draw against France in Hockey tournament

CAPETOWN, 24 JAN

The Indian men's hockey team failed to live up to its expectations after a bright start to draw 2-2 against France in its second game of the Four-Nation Tournament here on Wednesday.

Mandeep Singh (8th minute) and Amit Rohidas (19th) scored for India, while France came back in the contest with goals from Timothee Clement and B Gaspard in the 37th and 59th minutes respectively. The Indians had earlier defeated France 4-0 in their tournament opener on Monday. The match began with both the teams showcasing their defending prowess to hold off the opposition. India broke the resistance with Mandeep scoring the first goal for his side. Rohidas doubled India's lead early in the second quarter as they took control of the proceedings with a solid 2-0 lead.

France started showcasing urgency to get back to level terms, but the Indian defence managed to thwart their dangerous attacks. But India's defence finally broke down in the 37th minute when Clement reduced the margin. In the final quarter, both India and France made attacking moves in search of quick goals. The week-long tournament features France, the Netherlands, India and hosts South Africa. India will take on South Africa in their third match on Friday, followed by a game against world No 1 the Netherlands on Sunday. *—PTI*

NOT INTERESTED IN HOW OPPOSITION WILL PLAY: ROHIT

HYDERABAD, 24 JAN

Ahead of the first Test match between India and England at Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium in Hyderabad, skipper Rohit Sharma on Wednesday said that they are not interested in how their opposition is going to play.

While speaking at the pre-match press conference, Rohit was asked about England's 'Bazball' to which the 36-year-old said that they are more focused on what they can do as a team.

"We will look to play our cricket. I am not interested in how the opposition is going to play. I am focused on what we want to do as a team," Rohit said.

The skipper said that the win against South Africa in Cape Town was "good" and it gave them confidence. He added that it will be challenging to play good and consistent cricket throughout the five-match Test series. "The Cape Town win was good but that was Cape Town and this is Hyderabad, completely different conditions. But the atmosphere is pretty good and that's what happens when you win matches. That win gave us confidence. *—ANI*

3 spinners picked because of conditions, says Eng cap Stokes

HYDERABAD, 24 JAN

England's captain Ben Stokes during a practice session ahead of the first cricket test match against India **PHOTO: PTI**

England captain Ben Stokes on Tuesday rated Mark Wood as an "impact builder" with high pace after they decided to enter the first Test against India, starting here from Thursday, with a solitary fast bowler and three spinners.

Wood was preferred over veteran James Anderson for this match, and Stokes said the Durham man's ability to touch 150 clicks tilted the scales in his favour. "Obviously, what he brings with his high pace... he is a real impact builder. Bowling the 90 mile an hour with a reversing ball is obviously going to be very difficult to play against.

He's another weapon which you can use out here with short, sharp spells, wanting him to be bowling as fast as he can and short periods.

There're no worries about these long spells because that's how we're going to use him this week," said Stokes during his pre-match press meet here. So, how did the team management handle the situation of looking over a highly-experienced bowler like Anderson?

Stokes said Anderson has taken the whole episode quite professionally. "Jimmy's incredible professional. You never know how conditions might change and what you might feel as the best setup for your team. But now we're not looking at having to manage Jimmy or his workloads or anything like that. You know, we put him in the spot because we think he's one of the best performers," said Stokes.

Siraj's warning

India fast bowler Mohammed Siraj believes England's much-hyped 'Bazball' strategy won't work in Indian conditions and if the visitors go with their ultra-aggressive approach then the match may get over within two days. 'Bazball', a hell-for-leather attacking batting approach, coined after Test team head coach Brendon McCullum, has given England tremendous success last year but it will face its baptism by fire on sub-continental tracks, which offer turn and bounce in equal measure.

"If England play Bazball in Indian conditions, the match might get over within a day-and-a-half or two. It's not easy to hit every time here as the ball turns sometimes and straightens on other occasions," Siraj told 'Jio Cinema' on the eve of the opening Test beginning here on Thursday.

"So, I think it'll be difficult to see Bazball here. But if they play it, it'll be good for us as the match may get over quickly." *—PTI*

INDONESIA MASTERS

Kiran George, Lakshya Sen enter 2nd round; Prannoy, Srikanth exit

JAKARTA, 24 JAN

Lakshya Sen and Kiran George advanced to the second round but HS Prannoy and Kidambi Srikanth made early exits after suffering narrow losses in their respective opening matches at the Indonesia Masters Super 500 badminton tournament here on Wednesday.

World No 19 Sen, who is looking to qualify for the Paris Olympics, avenged his Malaysia Open first-round loss to China's Weng Hong Yang with a 24-22 21-15 win in his opening round match here.

The 23-year-old George, who had won Super 100 titles at 2022 Odisha Open and 2023 Denmark Masters, bounced back from an opening game reversal to eke out a 18-21 21-16 21-19 win over France's Toma Junior Popov in another opening round match.

George, also a product of Prakash Padukone Badminton Academy, had qualified for the main draw after registering twin wins on Tuesday. Sen will now face either Malaysia Open champion Anders Antonsen of Denmark or Indonesia's Chico Aura Dwi Wardoyo in the next round, while George will be pitted against China's Lu Guang Zu.

However, world no 8 Prannoy, who had reached the semifinals at India Open Super 750 last week, lost to former world champion Loh Kean Yew of Singapore 18-21 21-19 10-21 in his opening round match.

The 31-year-old Indian, who claimed maiden bronze medals at the Asian Games and world championships last year, had lost in the first round at the Malaysia Open Super 1000 tournament as well. For former world no. 1 Srikanth, it was yet another day when he had to return empty handed despite putting up a brave effort against Malaysia's Lee Zii Jia, ranked 10th.

Lakshya Sen avenged his Malaysia Open first-round loss to China's Weng Hong Yang with a 24-22 21-15 win **PHOTO: PTI**

- The 31-year-old Indian, who claimed maiden bronze medals at the Asian Games and world championships last year, had lost in the first round at the Malaysia Open Super 1000 tournament as well

Srikanth, who is racing against time to qualify for Paris, squandered an opening game advantage to lose 21-19 14-21 11-21 to Lee in a 54-minute clash to bow out of tournament. It was his second successive first-round loss of the season.

Sen was under pressure to perform following his miserable start to the new season which saw him make first-round exits in both the events he had participated so far. *—PTI*

Dabang Delhi win over Haryana Steelers

HYDERABAD, 24 JAN

Ashu Malik pulled off two raid points in dying seconds to help Dabang Delhi beat Haryana Steelers 35-32 in the Pro Kabaddi League contest here on Wednesday.

Vinay picked up three raid points as the Steelers took 4-2 lead in the fifth minute. However, Ashish and Vikrant effected brilliant tackles and helped Dabang Delhi take 6-5 lead soon after. Malik pulled off a brilliant raid as the Delhi side continued to forge ahead. Malik caught out Jaideep Dahiya and Yogesh tackled Ashish as Dabang inflicted the first all out of the match.

Siddharth Desai effected a raid and Rahul Sethpal tackled Manjeet, but the Delhi side still held a decent lead at 14-9. Vishal Bhardwaj and Yogesh picked up tackle points in quick succession as Dabang stayed ahead 15-10 in the 17th minute. The Steelers tackled Manjeet in the last few minutes of the first half, but the two teams went into the break with Delhi leading 18-13.

Desai pulled off a double-point raid in the opening minutes of the second half and narrowed the gap between the two sides.

PHOTO: X/ DABANG DELHI

- Desai effected a raid to help the Steelers inch ahead, but Malik pulled off a magnificent raid soon after and locked the scores at 31-31

The Steelers rode on the momentum and inflicted an all out to take 23-21 lead. Desai continued to showcase brilliant form as the Steelers surged ahead 27-24 in the 30th minute. However, the Delhi side fought back and levelled the scores at 28-28. Desai effected a raid to help the Steelers inch ahead, but Malik pulled off a magnificent raid soon after and locked the scores at 31-31. *—PTI*

Asian Cup: Good learning, says India soccer head coach

AL KHOR, 24 JAN

Following India's 1-0 loss to Syria in the Group B match of the AFC Asian Cup 2023 at the Al Bayt Stadium on Tuesday, the Blue Tigers head coach Igor Stimac said that it was a "good learning experience" for them. While speaking at the post-match press conference, Stimac said that his side proved that they can compete at this level.

"(It was a) good learning experience for us, I would say, because overall, in three games, we proved that we can compete at this level. Everybody sees what the missing points are in the Indian play: scoring goals, which comes with having good goal scorers in the team - people with confidence in front of the goal," Stimac said as quoted by Indian Super League's (ISL) official website.

The Croatian head coach was optimistic and said that they would be much stronger in the next edition of the AFC Asian Cup. "We can take a good lesson from here, and in the next edition of the AFC Asian Cup, we're going to be much stronger, definitely," he added. *—ANI*

PHOTO: PTI

SKY named ICC T20I Player of the Year for 2023

DUBAI, 24 JAN

Big-hitting batter Suryakumar Yadav was on Wednesday named the T20I Player of the Year for a second consecutive time by the International Cricket Council (ICC), which described him as the "backbone of India's middle order" in the format. Yadav did quite well in 2023 with an average that closed in on 50 and a strike rate exceeding 150. He is currently recuperating from a groin surgery that he underwent in Germany earlier this month. He is expected to be back in action in the IPL for the Mumbai Indians in March. "The backbone of India's middle order got starts throughout the year, delivering several match-winning contributions. This is the second consecutive year that the India batter has taken this award home," the ICC stated. Yadav's first innings of just seven to start the year against Sri Lanka was a mere speed bump in another prolific year. *—PTI*

Shah Khawar takes over as acting PCB chairman

LAHORE, 24 JAN

Shah Khawar, an advocate of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, has taken charge as acting chairman of the country's cricket board (PCB) on Wednesday after the resignation of Zaka Ashraf. Zaka Ashraf's resignation was accepted by PCB's patron-in-chief, the caretaker Prime Minister, Anwar ul Haq Kakar. "My primary responsibility will be to hold the election of Chairman PCB in a free and transparent manner at the earliest," Khawar said in a statement. But before he holds the elections for the Chairman's position, Khawar has to first form the Board of Governors which is made up of four representatives each of the affiliated departments and regional associations with the two nominees of the patron-in-chief also on the BOG. The elevation of Khawar, who is also the Election Commissioner of PCB, comes after the Ministry of Inter-Provincial Coordination issued a notification on Tuesday announcing that under Article 7(2) of the PCB Constitution the Election Commissioner is vested with the powers of Chairman PCB.*—PTI*

Maxwell needs to hold up his end of bargain, says coach

BRISBANE, 24 JAN

Glenn Maxwell is a vital cog in Australia's white-ball set up but he must "hold up his end of the bargain" after his "less than ideal" incident in Adelaide, said head coach Andrew McDonald. Last week Maxwell was hospitalised in Adelaide after he got too drunk after attending a concert by 'Six and Out', the band featuring former Australian pacer Brett Lee and passed out. He wasn't kept in the hospital for long and was discharged soon after and is now back in training. "I've spoken to Glenn, had a good chat with him yesterday around the incident. Him looking after himself needs to be a consideration moving forward," McDonald was quoted as saying to Sydney Evening News. *—PTI*

India's boxer Jangra to fight for intercontinental title

NEW DELHI, 24 JAN

India's professional boxer Mandeep Jangra will fight for the intercontinental title against American Gerardo Esquivel at Toppenish City, Washington state, in the USA on Friday. Jangra, who trains under Roy Jones Jr, will fight in the 59 kg category and he has worked a lot to come down from his usual 75 kg class, a release said. It will be the biggest fight of his career. Jangra has six fights under his belt so far and has won all of them, with four been knockout victories, according to the release. He won his first fight in 2021 while his last one was in August 2023. *—PTI*